

MOVING A CONGREGATION TOWARD
A DIVERSE EXPRESSION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD:
A CASE STUDY

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BY
HEATHER RENÉE ARDREY

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To my family – thank you for believing in me

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ABSTRACT

While Lynn Church of the Nazarene is diverse by many metrics, it has not been able to break the barriers preventing engagement with the various language groups within our city. To faithfully fulfill the call of God on the gathered people of God, we must engage the entire community including other cultural groups. What would it take to move a congregation toward a more diverse community which shares church leadership and ministry with all represented cultures? A church can only make this transition by prayerfully addressing issues of identity, power, and calling.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

[Van Der Linden]: Dr. King, how many white people are members of your church in Atlanta?

[King]: I don't have any white members, Mr. Van Der Linden.

[Van Der Linden]: Well sir, you said integration is the law of the land, and it's morally right, whereas segregation is morally wrong, and the president should do something about it. Do you mean the president should issue an order that the schools and the churches and the stores should all be integrated?

[King]: I think it is one of the tragedies of our nation, one of the shameful tragedies, that eleven o'clock on Sunday morning is one of the most segregated hours, if not the most segregated hours, in Christian America. I definitely think the Christian church should be integrated, and any church that stands against integration and that has a segregated body is standing against the spirit and the teachings of Jesus Christ, and it fails to be a true witness. But this is something that the Church will have to do itself. I don't think church integration will come through legal processes. I might say that my church is not a segregating church. It's segregated but not segregating. It would welcome white members.

– Transcript of Interview with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
Meet the Press, April 17, 1960

The Problem

Christian leaders desire deep community for our churches, which can be difficult to achieve when people in the United States are increasingly diverse. Differences among people can affect the ways we manage church, family, work, friendships, and community relationships. God cares deeply about diversity, building it into the very fabric of creation. For this reason, he created a way, through Christ, for us to become a community of varied people joined together on mission without losing what makes each of us unique.

Given the call of God to love our neighbor and the increasing diversity in America as a whole, the church should be leading the way in living and working and relating across ethnic

and cultural differences. However, the church often lags behind and while we have made some movement in de-segregating our churches since the time of the civil rights movement, it has not been as much progress as Dr. King dreamed. As Dr. King said, most churches are not 'segregating', that is they do not intentionally set out to separate themselves by ethnic groups, and yet only 5.5% of Christian churches are racially mixed, and some of these only for the time it takes to transition from one race to the other.¹

Diversity spans a broader range than simply ethnic/race diversity to include educational diversity, generational, gender, political, and economic diversity at a minimum. I asked a sampling of pastors in the New England Nazarene district, "What are your biggest challenges in helping your congregation develop community across differences?" Fourteen percent of respondents answered with some variation of 'our community is mostly white,' as if that got them off the hook. While diversity includes ethnic and race issues, and often these are the most visible, in the context of this project diversity is defined as the range of differences between any two people or groups of people.

The diversity of a given church context is affected by a variety of factors. The makeup of a given community will often directly influence the diversity makeup of a congregation. However, the diversity of a given community itself is also influenced by negative factors such as self-segregation and biased housing and lending policies that range from subtly to blatantly racist which influence who purchases homes in which communities. Additionally, the simple preferences and comfort of those choosing where to move effect the ending makeup of a

1. Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey, and Karen Chai Kim, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2. They define "a racially mixed congregation as one in which no one racial group is 80% or more of the congregation."

community. A study called “Parable of the Polygons” illustrates how small personal biases can lead to large-scale self-segregation.² Even if people only want to move if less than 1/3 of the people living near them are like them, over time this small personal bias multiplied over many people results in large-scale self-segregation. When you add this small-scale personal bias to want to be near people who are similar to you to the larger scale biased policies, the segregation of some communities can become much more marked.

While the diverse makeup, or lack thereof, within a specific community can affect how diverse a given congregation is, this is not always the case. Some churches do not reflect their surrounding area because the people who gather drive in, or commute to church. This self-selection of which church to attend is compounded by the same drives which were unearthed in the study shown above. Generally, people choose churches where there are at least some, if not most, people similar to themselves.

Within the church itself another layer exists which influences the diversity of a congregation. There was a period within U.S. church history when we bought in wholesale to the idea of developing and reaching a ‘target audience.’ Church leaders were encouraged to look at your community, figure out which ‘group’ had the largest potential, and develop your church growth strategy around that group. In *Divided by Faith*, Michael Emerson and Christian Smith point out the flaw in that argument, stating “the processes that generate church growth, internal strength, and vitality in a religious marketplace also internally homogenize and

2. Vi Hart and Nicki Case, “Parable of the Polygons: A Playable Post on the Shape of Society,” ncase.me, accessed February 6, 2020, <http://ncase.me/polygons>.

externally divide people.”³ That strategy caused churches to ask the wrong questions (“What does that group want/need in a church?” instead of “What is our calling? Faithful response in this community?”). Additionally, the results of this church growth strategy led to individual churches intentionally recruiting and retaining people who were largely the same in some way. Seeker sensitivity within churches is not bad in and of itself, but it is bad when it becomes the MISSION of the church. The mission of the church is not to make itself palatable to a particular group, it is to follow Jesus faithfully as a community.

Regardless of the ethnic makeup of a particular community, diversity will always be found in any given church neighborhood context. People will live there who differ in age, educational backgrounds, amounts of money earned; they will structure their families differently. Additionally, they will vary by genders, race, language groups, and political affiliations. Whatever the diversity makeup of a community, the call of God is the same – to make disciples of all, inviting them to follow Jesus with a group of increasingly diverse folks, gathered and serving across differences. In response to the call of Jesus on our communal lives, the church should be leading the way in living this kind of deep community across deep differences, but often is not.

The heart of my thesis-project wrestles with this question – What keeps the church from engaging in genuine community across differences? In year one of my doctoral studies, I led a small group with the idea that people WANTED to live this way on an individual level and simply didn’t have the resources and training to do it. In year two, I expanded on this to explore why

3. Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem with Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 142.

we don't see this happening at a church level, surveying pastors on a district level. I designed the survey to explore whether it is a lack of training, resources, knowledge, or intentionality, that keeps churches from becoming more diverse.

For this final year project, my case study is based in my local church context. There I explored the idea that before a church can embrace the calling of Jesus to an increasingly diverse community that has deep community across deep differences, they must be willing to wrestle with issues of identity, calling, and power.

The Ministry Setting

This thesis-project takes place in the Lynn Church of the Nazarene in Lynn, MA. We are anchored in a specific culture, denomination, and city. Understanding what each of these contexts contributes to our local congregation will help to better understand the ministry setting for this thesis-project.

Cultural Historical Foundation

A brief overview of the influences of American culture will be helpful in knowing the context of any church which resides there. Because of the scope of this thesis-project, what follows will necessarily be only a sketch of these influences.

When the American government was first set up, the founding fathers intentionally sought to separate church and state in definition while, culturally, the country still considered itself Christian. At that time, in western culture, you could expect a level of biblical knowledge, an agreement with biblical morality, and an overlap of church life with social life. This wedding

of church culture with general culture, known in general as Christendom, has been around in various forms since the time of Constantine. It is in the context of Christendom that most Catholic and Protestant understandings of the church were formed. However, this context is shifting.

Lesslie Newbigin calls this shift the “dissolution...of the synthesis between the Gospel and the culture.”⁴ The results of this dissolution are important, because they influence the function and context of the church. This shift affects everyone living in America, so looking briefly at some aspects of this shift will help anchor our cultural context for the purposes of this thesis-project: atomization, pluralism, relativism, consumerism, and hyper-politicization. These aspects are often woven together, are difficult to separate from each other, and are presented as sketches here.

Atomization describes the ways in which the “ties which bound men and women” are coming unraveled.⁵ People are more and more separated from one another, unknown by others, and indistinct from the masses. Mobility that allows people to follow jobs and opportunities also results in fragmented communities, and surface-level relational connections. Not knowing others well leads us to experience strangers as background noise and objects in the landscape around us rather than human beings whom we have not yet met.

Pluralism means that we no longer share the same culture as others in our country, states, cities, or neighborhoods. The sheer volume of choices causes us to be shaped in very individual ways. Whereas just a generation or two ago, everyone only had access to the same

4. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1953), 11.

5. Newbigin, *The Household of God*, 13.

few TV programs, today you might share a cultural shaping with very few people beyond your own home.

Relativism, or the inability to agree upon what is true, also affects this. As the stories that shape us vary more and more, we agree less on what is objectively true. Your truth becomes different than mine.⁶ Atomization, pluralism, and relativism combine to chip away at our ability to agree on what is meant when we speak to each other, as our increased separation, individualized shaping, and personal truth can make it harder to understand the other.

Consumerism is an exceptionally powerful force in nearly every expression of western culture. You can purchase anything you desire, which results in things which were not meant to be products being turned into consumables. We treat love, virtue, joy, and even other people as if they are things we can acquire (if we have enough money) and use for our own ends.

Hyper-politicization is the idea that politics and government can solve all our problems. As cultures fracture into ever smaller segments, our desire to be a part of the dominant culture tends to increase.⁷ So, we work to get 'our' people into places of power so that we can 'convert' others to our values. However, people do not take well to values that are forced on them, so no heart change truly takes place. Instead we watch the pendulum swing back and forth as different groups try to steer a country full of a variety of cultures and beliefs to embrace their narrow vision of the future.

6. James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). Pluralism and relativism are discussed at length in Hunter's book as 'difference' and 'dissolution.'

7. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 102.

Despite the potentially pessimistic tone of this snapshot, there are a great many opportunities for the church during this shift in our larger cultural context. The increased connection afforded by globalization, and the internet, can be a gift that allows us to better connect with our brothers and sisters in other places. In addition, I believe the assumptions of Christendom resulted in the church to stagnating in ways that are antithetical to the gospel. The dissolution of these same assumptions will provide freedom to try new things.

I do not wish to be cynical of our current milieu, just realistic. Atomization, pluralism, relativism, consumerism, and hyper-politicization are part of the air we are breathing while trying to remain faithful to God in our present American culture. I believe it is possible to remain faithful, and that scripture guides us as to the purpose of the church in all times, but we must be aware of our context if we are to know how to articulate this purpose in a way that makes sense. The culture around us is constantly forming ways that may or may not be biblical or Christian. As individuals, our intention to remain faithful is not enough. Unless we gather in communities to pursue faithfulness together, this conditioning will erode our ability to believe in and follow God.⁸

Churches in America today tend to choose one of three main options for how to handle this onslaught of cultural conditioning: to defend against it, to make themselves relevant to it, or to remain pure from it.⁹ However, there is another option on the table which is laid out in scripture: Become a community of people seeking to be Christ followers in the midst of

8. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 203.

9. Hunter does a good job laying out these three paradigms in his chapter "Old Cultural Wineskins."

whatever environment they find themselves in.¹⁰ This theological concept will be further explored in chapter two.

Denominational Setting

Lynn Church of the Nazarene (Lynn Church) has been serving the city of Lynn since 1888, though they did not join the Nazarene church until the denomination began in 1907. The Church of the Nazarene birthed as a merger of various holiness denominations, which formed after a split with Methodism, which held to a Wesleyan understanding of scripture and emphasized the ways in which the doctrine of holiness influences life this side of heaven. As Lynn Church is a member of this denomination, it is important to address two pieces of Nazarene history/polity that affect and influence the ways in which the research question lives in our local setting. The first is a doctrinal issue, and the second is a pragmatic issue.

The Church of the Nazarene continues to hold the doctrine of holiness as one of its distinctive doctrines. Even the unofficial hymn of the denomination says that, “Holiness unto the Lord is our watchword and song.” Briefly stated, the doctrine of holiness is the theological concept that God invites us to a holy life separated from sin and separated to God, and that by the power of the Spirit that holy life is possible *in this life*. Over time, throughout the history of the Nazarene denomination, the emphasis within the doctrine of holiness has shifted. At times, the focus of the teaching of this doctrine has been on separation from sin, what the nature or possibility of that separation would be. Other times there has been an emphasis on the ‘attainment’ of holiness as a separate moment from salvation, as to when, where, or how it

10. This is the central thesis of Hunter’s book.

happens. Many books have covered the doctrine of holiness, the specifically Wesleyan understanding of it, the specifically Nazarene understanding of it, and attempting to bring that doctrine from its 18th-century roots to 21st-century culture.¹¹

The focus on ‘separation from sin’ has negatively influenced our ability to make community across differences within a local church context. I can remember well intentioned Nazarene youth leaders telling me that I couldn’t be friends with non-Christians because it wasn’t the ‘Christian’ thing to do. At the heart of their concern was the fear that associating with non-Christians would turn me into someone who engaged in risky behaviors – drugs, alcohol, sex, etc. I grew up in a time of ‘stay away from movies’ (at least theaters), ‘stay away from stores and restaurants that serve alcohol’, and ‘stay away from non-Christian music.’ In essence, we translated ‘keep yourself from evil’ into ‘keep yourself away from any non-Christians.’ This leads some churches within our denomination to enclave themselves from their community and have a ‘spiritual’ reason for doing so. However, the calling of scripture is not that we are not to separate ourselves from a sinful world, but instead from our *own* sinful selves, and be set apart for the sake of the world as Christ’s ambassadors.¹² “God’s means of (re)shaping us into the imago Dei, of making us holy, is inseparable from – indeed, primarily

11. For a basic theological overview, you can start with John Wesley’s classic book, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1966). For an explanation and overview of some of the 20th-century themes within the doctrine of holiness I would recommend Mildred Bang Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1972). Josh Broward and Thomas Ord, eds, *Renovating Holiness* (Nampa, ID: Sacra Sage, 2015) is a recent collection of essays by pastors and theologians in the church of the Nazarene seeking to understand Wesley’s formational doctrine for today’s cultural setting. Finally, for a history and overview of the changing dynamics around the discussion of the doctrine of Holiness within the Nazarene church I would recommend Mark Quastrom, *A Century of Christian Holiness: The Doctrine of Entire Sanctification in the Church of the Nazarene: 1905-2004* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2004).

12. For more on this, see Heather Ardrey, “Everyday Holiness: Meditations on Identity and Calling: Mark 1 & 2,” in *Renovating Holiness*, ed. Thomas Jay Oord and Josh Broward (Nampa, ID: Sacra Sage, 2015).

constituted by – our participation in, and witness to, the mission Dei whose ultimate goal is to bring creation to its intended destiny.”¹³ In other words, we have to engage the world in a real way to be an effective part of the mission of God. When we turn to the theological and biblical foundation in chapter two, this call to engage the world will be explored more fully.

Another aspect of our denominational context, which is relevant for this case study is the pragmatic issues of ethnic- and language-specific churches. For decades now the predominant policy of many districts in the Nazarene church is for growing or planting ethnic- or language specific churches rather than multi-language or multi-cultural churches. The leadership felt this was best to aid in the preservation of minority cultures. This has resulted in a local church birthing multiple smaller language- or ethnic-specific churches in one building, rather than growing one larger multi-ethnic church. This practice has advantages and disadvantages. Ethnic and linguistic minorities retain autonomy over their churches and ministries in a local setting. But often the financial and building resources tend to reside with the largely white church body even if that church is the largest in the space.

I am not advocating for a large-scale departure from this previous emphasis on ethnic-specific churches, but there are a variety of issues that remain unaddressed if this is the only model for ministry in a local church setting. It is possible to end up with churches segregating themselves on Sunday morning in a community that is not segregated throughout the week. While this can help those in the linguistic minority, it also leaves all the churches, regardless of their language/cultural base, with similar problems. White/English-speaking churches struggle to reach across cultural/language barriers to connect with other ethnic groups in their

13. Andy Johnson, *Holiness and the Missio Dei* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016), xvi.

community, while ethnic/linguistic-focused churches struggle to remain connected to their kids as their youth learn to speak primarily English in their schools. This was highlighted for me a few years back as I led a discipleship ministry training on ‘reaching the next generation.’ The training was offered to all the discipleship ministry leaders from the New England District church of the Nazarene. There was a wide diversity of ethnic and language groups represented in the room. After the presentation, I opened the floor for questions and the ethnic-specific church leaders said they had come because they wanted to know how to retain their youth. Their churches were language-specific, but as their kids and youth learned English, and became influenced by a general American culture, they were less interested in attending a language- and cultural-specific church, so they felt they were losing their young people.

Whether it is a predominantly English-speaking, white congregation trying to reach a diverse neighborhood, or an ethnic- or linguistic-specific congregation trying to retain their kids, it is worth exploring what it would look like to develop multi-ethnic, multi-lingual churches intentionally. But, at this point, the Nazarene denomination has not placed an emphasis on multi-ethnic churches. I have heard it said you measure or track what you value. To aid in my project for year two, I reached out to the Nazarene Research department at the denominational headquarters for diversity data. Information on age, gender, family makeup, ethnicities, education level, and languages spoken in any neighborhood *around* a Nazarene ministry site is available through a denominational website. However, when I asked for the same information on the Nazarene *congregations*, I was told this data does not exist. We do not even have data on which churches reflect the diversity level of their neighborhood. We can’t

move forward in a movement toward multi-ethnic church expressions if we don't even know where or IF these exist within the denomination.

Community Context

"Lynn, Lynn, the City of Sin, you never come out the way you came in."¹⁴ A poem which was likely written about the city during the temperance movement, speaks volumes about the reputation it holds in the surrounding area. Those who live here know it is just like any other city, with rich history and cultural expressions, as well as the crime rate that can come with 94,600 people living in roughly 10.5 square miles. Lynn is located just north of Boston on the shore of the Atlantic Ocean.

Of Lynn's 94,000 people, 25% are under the age of 18, 79% graduated from high school, but only 20% have a bachelor's degree. Thirty-nine percent are Latino, 38% are white non-Latino, 13% are black, 8% are Asian, 6% are 2 or more races, .3% indigenous American, and .2% pacific islander. Of the entire population, 51.5% primarily speak a non-English language at home.¹⁵

The people residing within the city limits come from a few different 'pockets' of society which can be categorized in four ways. First, there are those who were born and raised here, many whose families have lived here for generations. This group is largely white and English-speaking. Second, over the past 30 years Lynn has become a place where many immigrants

14 . "Lynn, Lynn, City of Sin," Lynn English Class of '65, accessed February 6, 2020, lynnenglish1965.info/2011/06/lynn-lynn-city-of-sin.

15. "QuickFacts: City of Lynn, Massachusetts," U.S. Census Bureau, updated July 1, 2019, accessed February 6, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/lynncitymassachusetts>.

have either chosen to come with their families or been placed here by immigration officials. This group is of a variety of ethnicities, languages, and countries of origin. The third, smaller group are those who have transplanted here because of the many rehab facilities and post-prison supports. Lynn has allowed for many addiction centers and sober houses to support people in recovery. The final group could be considered the gentrification crowd. Lynn is one of the few remaining pockets of affordable housing within easy commuting distance to Boston, so as middle to upper-middle income people get priced out of Boston, they are moving in.

Arguably, the segment that has affected and changed the culture of the city of Lynn the most over the past three decades is the increase in recent immigrants. According to an article by PBS News Hour, the number of school children emigrating from Central American countries to Lynn increased nine times over the course of a three-year period.¹⁶ Growth like this is not unusual for the city of Lynn. A September 2019 article highlighted the effects the exponential growth is having on the school system, specifically at the high school level. One high school had 151 more new students (1,896 total) this year than they did last year, which saw only 31 more new students than the year before. This has strained classrooms to the point where some high school classes have upwards of 40 students.¹⁷ While the article does not distinguish where the new students are coming from, it is most likely driven by the continuing trend of immigrants moving to Lynn. At the local elementary school where my children attend, half a mile down the

16. Andrew Troast, "Massachusetts mayor says her city feeling effects of immigrant surge," PBS News Hour, August 27, 2014, accessed February 6, 2020, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/immigrant-surge-pressures-distant-cities>.

17. Bella diGrazia, "Lynn School Officials Address Overcrowding," Itemlive.com, September 27, 2019, accessed February 6, 2020, <https://www.itemlive.com/2019/09/27/lynn-school-officials-address-overcrowding/>.

street from our church, they have a flag in the entryway outside of the main office for every country represented in the building. The last time I checked, there were 35 flags flying.

Lynn Church predates the Nazarene denomination, having started as The Mission Church in November of 1888. By 1898, it was known as the First Pentecostal church. When the opportunity came to join the Nazarene church, in November of 1907, they became the First Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene. The church has met at its present location, on Eastern Ave, since they purchased the property in 1929. You can see from figure 1 below that Lynn Church is on the very Eastern border the city of Lynn shares with its neighbor, Swampscott.

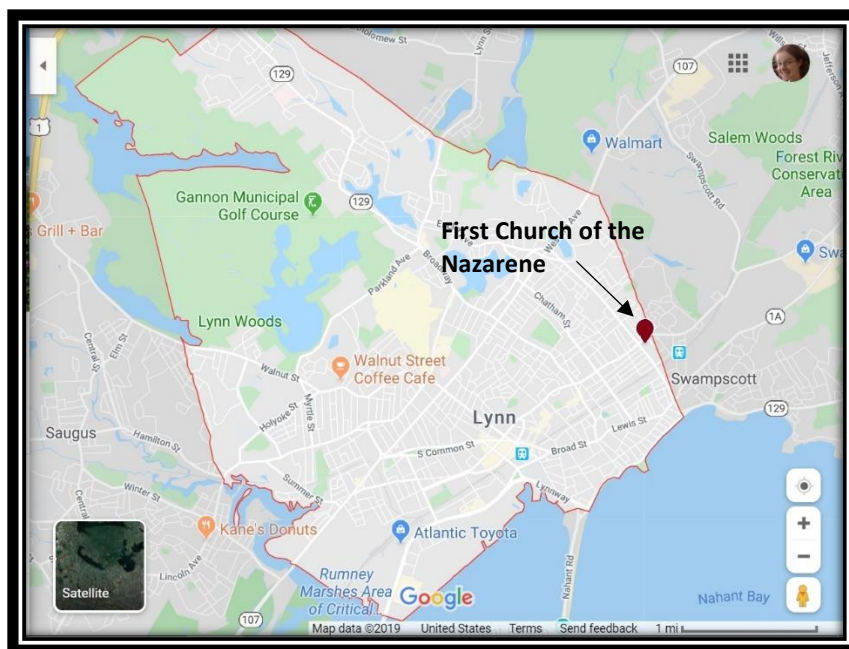


Figure 1. Church Location. Image courtesy of Google Maps.

This location puts Lynn Church in a unique position in relation to other churches in the city. Lynn is surrounded on nearly all sides by cities whose populations are less ethnically and economically diverse than Lynn. These other cities have higher property values, some quite

dramatic. One street over from the church, in Swampscott, the median property value increases more than \$200k over the median property value in Lynn.¹⁸ This speaks to the economic diversity that exists literally on our doorstep.

Lynn Church serves in an increasingly diversifying city that is not immune to the effects of gentrification and the housing crunch/crisis that all the Boston Metro area is experiencing. Within one mile of our church you can find houses on the market for less than \$200K and houses for more than \$800K. Within one mile of our church you can find students getting a public education that rivals some of the best in the state, and students getting a public education in a Title 1 school that struggles with underfunding and overcrowding. You will find people living in our neighborhood who were born in a variety of different countries, whose families speak a variety of different languages, who have a variety of different educational and life experiences, some living paycheck to paycheck, and others dealing in trust funds.

Our church has been one known unofficially on our denominational district as one of the more diverse Nazarene churches in this region. Looking at a snapshot of our current demographics can confirm this unofficial title. Our church has about 46 people who regularly attend, and we have some level of diversity in almost any metric.¹⁹ There are people attending who range in age from 2 to 98, including at least one person in every decade. We have people of a variety of ethnicities and countries of origin. Some of the people attending are very stable financially, and others are facing financial insecurities. We have some who did not finish high

18. Thomas Grillo, "Median Home Prices Rose in Most North Shore Communities in 2018," Itemlive.com, January 23, 2019, accessed February 6, 2020, <https://www.itemlive.com/2019/01/23/median-home-prices-rose-in-most-north-shore-communities-in-2018/>.

19. See chapter four for more details on this.

school, and others with their PhD's, with nearly a third of our adult population in school of some kind at the moment. We have both men and women, young and old, black, white, Caribbean and Latino.

The diversity within our congregation has been a part of the church's identity for at least the remembered history of our church. However, we do not reflect the diversity of our community. If we were to do as the local elementary school and hang flags in our entryway, we would only have four flags representing the countries of origin. To my knowledge, none in attendance speaks a language other than English in their homes. Although, demographically, our church has some diversity in it, throughout its history the functional culture of the church has been determined predominantly by the white/Anglo evangelical culture. For this reason, while our church is diverse, it functions as mono-cultural, as there is an obvious and predominant cultural group that shapes the ethos of the gathered community. My desire through this thesis-project is to explore how we can move toward a multi-faceted diverse expression of the kingdom of God, which has many cultures sharing power for culture-shaping, and leadership within our community.

According to our church board, the church has been functionally in decline/death for the last 20-25 years.²⁰ A glance at the attendance numbers would show that there has not been numerical growth for a much longer period of time – at least since the mid-70s. In their verbal self-assessment, the board said that at least since 1990 they would consider the church to be in decline or old age, heading toward death.²¹ In that time, they have seen their sense of vision, all

20. Self-assessment based on "A Season for Everything – Life Cycle of a Church," May 10, 2018, accessed February 6, 2020, <https://healthygrowingchurches.com/a-season-for-everything-life-cycle-of-a-church/>.

21. See figure 2, Life Cycle of a Church, page 18.

the structures, and ministries die off. Unusually for a church in this life stage, the only thing sustaining them to remain an active church is the depth of their relationships, accompanied by a sense of grit.

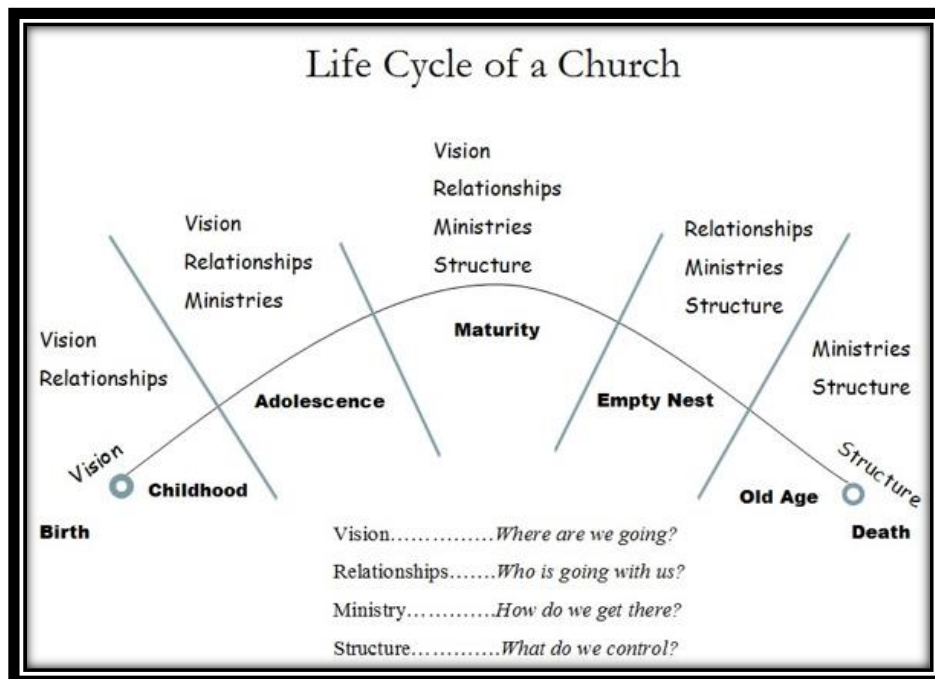


Figure 2. Life Cycle of a Church. "A Season for Everything – Life Cycle of a Church," May 10, 2018, accessed February 6, 2020, <https://healthygrowingchurches.com/a-season-for-everything-life-cycle-of-a-church/>.

This grit is best illustrated by one of my favorite stories I heard upon arrival. The District Superintendent had called a meeting of the church to discuss the future and the way forward when it became clear the previous pastor needed to retire. The weeknight meeting was well attended by people faithful in support and attendance. Doris was also in attendance. Doris, who joined the church November 12, 1933, is our oldest at 98 years old and longest standing member. The District superintendent told me how she came up to him in her wheelchair and said (I'm paraphrasing), "You're not here to close the doors of the church, are you? It will close over my dead body." Unlike some, who might threaten in this way, Doris was not using this

statement to get her own way. I think she was embodying the grit and determination inherent in a congregation who has existed in this space for 132 years. There is a determination, on the part of the congregation, to want to be about the kingdom work in the space. Though when I arrived, there was little sense of what this work was, or what the way forward should look like.

In the same time period that the church has been in a steady state/decline, the community around our church was seeing shifts as well. Between the years of 1990 and 2010 the Hispanic population in Lynn tripled in size from 9% to 32% of the overall population.²² During the same period, the white, non-Hispanic population decreased by one third. My guess is that the 2020 census will show these trends continuing. The population shift did not result in an accompanying shift of demographics within our local church setting, which leaves me to question, why?

While the Lynn church is diverse in many metrics, it has not been able to break this barrier to engage the various language groups within our city. I believe to continue to fulfill the call of God on the gathered people of God here faithfully, we must engage the *entire* community in the Lynn area, including other cultural and other language groups. However, I also perceive that the church is not yet ready to do this. I would like to explore the issue of identity and attitude towards others, in the light of the gospel call to go into the world and preach the gospel, specifically helping the congregation wrestle with a willingness to share power with other cultural groups in the replant of our congregation.

22. U.S. Census Bureau, "1990 Census of Population, General Population Characteristics, Massachusetts," U.S. Department of Commerce, accessed February 6, 2020, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1990/cp-1/cp-1-23.pdf>, 42, and U.S. Census Bureau, "Massachusetts 2010: Summary Population and Housing Characteristics," U.S. Department of Commerce, December 2012, accessed February 6, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/cph-1-23.pdf>, 36, 37.

Project Overview

Thesis Question and Hypothesis

The question I am wrestling with in this thesis-project is: What would it take for a mono-cultural diverse congregation in Lynn, MA to become a more diverse congregation with shared culture and shared leadership? My hypothesis is, a church can only make this transition by prayerfully addressing issues of identity, power, and calling.

Methodology and Parameters

This thesis-project was a case study, starting in March of 2019 and ending in December of 2019. The project begins with a snapshot of where the congregation was at the beginning of the case study. The work of the project includes three sermon series (some of which are whole congregation interactive sermons), two vision gathering conversations, a final self-assessment survey, and email interviews. Exploring the ideas of calling to be on mission, mission as receiving hospitality from others, openness to the other, right use of power in hospitality, and anchoring all of these in the witness of scripture, I encouraged my congregation to engage their sense of identity, power, and calling.

At the conclusion of the project, I gave a church-wide survey and conducted an email interview with 4-6 of the adults at the church. I end the project by utilizing the qualitative data to give an updated snapshot showing where I perceive the growth in the areas of identity and calling within the congregation to be. Finally, I reflected on what the next steps might be to

help move the congregation toward a willingness to share leadership and vision of this local congregation with another culture.

Outline of Thesis Paper

Now that the problem of the thesis-project has been positioned in its setting, we can lay the biblical and theological foundation, which will be the work of chapter two. There I will anchor the theology of this project in a biblical understanding of the church and church leadership. I will then address God's heart for and calling to a diverse expression of the kingdom of God which begins now to reflect what we will experience at the *eschaton*. Finally, I will look at a biblical understanding of how power is to be used before turning to the theological theme of hospitality as a way forward in becoming a multi-ethnic local congregation.

In chapter three, I will engage a brief overview of some of the most important resources from the following three categories that have most influenced my thinking on these topics inherent in this thesis-project. First, I will look at resources on Christian leadership and ways to help engage the change process for a congregation. I will emphasize discipleship resources in particular, focusing on books that help think through the shaping of identity, attitude, and calling. Second, I will explore resources on the theology of diversity, including reflections on how the lack of diversity has hindered the church's witness, as well as the power dynamics at play there. Finally, I will look at resources that explore the ways in which the church historically has understood and engaged in acts of hospitality, particularly paying attention to the biblical/theological roots. Books that might be helpful but not discussed in the scope of this project will be included in the bibliography.

In chapter four, I will outline the methodologies and timeline of the project including a summary of the sermons, gatherings, and surveys. Finally, chapter five will look at the results of this project, including any growth I have witnessed in individuals and the congregation over these months. I will reflect on whether the hypothesis was accurate, or needs adjustment, ending with some potential next steps to build on this work.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Ministering in a city as diverse as Lynn we can easily find ourselves surrounded by people who are different than us because their language, mannerisms, cultures, and way of life are not the same as our own. In exploring the issues of identity, calling, and power-sharing in such a diverse ecclesial setting, we must lay a biblical and theological framework for the conversation. To this end, this chapter will begin with an overview of the theology of the church and leadership that undergirds this project. Next, I will explore the themes of diversity in scripture, ending the chapter with a look at power and hospitality in the kingdom of God.

Theology of Church and Leadership

There is an actual, visible, earthly company which is addressed as “the people of God,” and “Body of Christ.” It is surely a fact of inexhaustible significance that what our Lord left behind Him was not a book, nor a creed, nor a system of thought, nor a rule of life, but a visible community.... A community called together by the deliberate choice of the Lord Himself, and re-created in Him, gradually sought – and is seeking – to make explicit who He is and what He has done.

—Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God*

What is the church? And what ought it to be? The answers to these and similar questions is of utmost importance for any practitioner seeking to help the church answer the call of God. Without a thoroughly biblical, necessarily Christian understanding of what we’re meant to be, any thesis-project in leadership in a changing church context would neglect the central aspect of that: the church. After a brief overview of some biblical themes, I will share a theology of church before turning to a biblical theology of leadership within that church.

Biblical Foundation for the Church

The story contained within the Bible is the history of how God called a specific people for a specific purpose. Any attempt to live into the calling of God must be faithful to the whole of this biblical narrative. Within the scope of this thesis, I can only offer the briefest overview of biblical theology of the nature of the church. As such, my purpose in this survey is not to be exhaustive, but rather *illustrative* of the directionality and scope of God's desire for his people.

Old Testament

The Old Testament contains the seeds of what Jesus later establishes through the work of the Spirit in the New Testament. In the Old Testament God actively gathers a community and sends them on mission. From the very beginning, the calling of God is that the people he has chosen would *be with him* and exist *for the sake of others*.

Genesis 12:1-3

In Genesis 12, God says to Abram, "Go to the place I'll show you; I will bless you."¹ Abram is sent on a journey. He is to go, although he's not yet told where he's going. God's guidance launches him into mission and guides him while he's on that mission. Additionally, God will bless Abram. God is upfront about the purpose of the blessing he is going to bestow. The blessing does not exist for Abram's sake, or even for the sake of those traveling with him. "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, *so that you will*

1. Summative paraphrase of Genesis 12:1-3.

be a blessing."² The blessing given to Abram is so that he can bless others. Others are blessed through the obedience of the ones who have been sent. At no point in the biblical narrative does the church reach a place where they can say they have 'arrived.' From the very beginning of the story, the people of God are a people on a journey. This concept of a journeying people continues throughout the Old Testament and into the New.

Jeremiah 29:4-14

In one of the most quoted and misused verses of scripture, Jeremiah says that God knows the plans he has for us.³ People often recite this verse as if it's meant for them individually and personally. However, the context of the verse makes it clear that the plans God has are for *his community*. In Jeremiah, this community finds itself taken from its homeland and plopped into a foreign land that seems antithetical to everything to which God has called them. They have been taken against their will. They arrive and God declares to them, 'I sent you there.' That's disorienting enough, but it's followed by an invitation to care for the welfare (*shalom*) of the place they've just arrived. "But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."⁴ To be clear, this means they are to be praying for the shalom of *the people who have just taken them by force into captivity*. We see a beautiful picture here of God's intention for his people –

2. Genesis 12:2. All Scripture is quoted from the English Standard Version of the Bible unless otherwise indicated.

3. Jeremiah 29:11.

4. Jeremiah 29:7.

to invest in the communities where they find themselves, regardless of how they got there, trusting that God has placed them there for a purpose.

God started the story of his people by calling them to be with him and blessing them so they can bless others. Wherever they are sent by God, God encourages and invites them to invest in the places and people they encounter. The themes from the Old Testament continue in the New, we will turn our attention there presently.

Gospels

Mark 3:13-19

The calling of the disciples in the early chapters of Mark teach us about the purpose of the church as well. Specifically, in chapter 3, Jesus declares to his disciples what they are to be. “And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, *to be with him*, and *to be sent out* to proclaim the message, and *to have authority* to cast out demons.”⁵ He called them to three specific things: to be with him, to be sent out, to have authority. Our first job as children of God is to stay connected to our source – “to be with him” through the Spirit. Likewise, we are called “to be sent out.” This connects with the themes of the Old Testament that the people of God exist for those outside of themselves. As the apostles are sent to proclaim the message of Jesus, so are we.

The translation of the third piece, the authority to cast out demons, is less clear to me for our context. Jesus is giving his disciples authority, and therefore we have his authority in the world. In American culture, we have little experience with the demons of scripture. So, what

5. Mark 3:14-15.

exactly are we to “cast out”? Some might argue that there are still literal demons we should learn to notice and send away with the authority of Jesus. There is not space to get into the arguments for or against this within the scope of this paper. However, the idea that we can use the authority Jesus gives us to interact with and shape the prevailing forces in our world is a compelling one to me. It leads me to ask, what are the forces in our world that are contrary to the ways of God, that he has given us authority to speak against in his name? Some of the most damaging forces I can think of for the vulnerable among us are systemic injustice, oppression, racism, sexism, and addictions of various kinds. Our calling as children of God, in addition to being with him, and being sent out, includes this authority to speak and work against these destructive and damaging forces.

Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

Luke 10 holds a beautiful picture of what church could be like. While there is a lot to unpack here, I want to look specifically at the style of teaching/learning Jesus employs to aid his disciples in their growth. To this point in Luke there has been quite a bit of teaching in the traditional sense. Jesus shared words and thoughts while his disciples listened. Then here, in chapter 10, Jesus employs a different tact. After a few words of instruction, he sends them off in pairs to practice the work of the kingdom. The disciples go, trying his teaching and instruction through their interactions with others, then come back to discuss it with Jesus.

Jesus is engaging his disciples in a process of, what today we would call, action learning. Adults learn best through *doing*. More than simply a transaction of knowledge, action learning engages the learner in an active process where they can apply ideas to real life situations, and

then have space to discuss how it went. Many churches neglect to include this type of teach-try-reflect cycle in their strategies of discipleship.

John 17

Jesus' prayer for his disciples in John 17 speaks volumes about the purpose of the church. Two themes are worth mentioning in this brief overview. Both themes show up in verse 21, "That they may all be one. As you, Father are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me," and 23, "I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

First, the goal of the church is unity. For those following Jesus, despite our differences, God calls us to be one. The model for this unity is the unity of the godhead – Father, Son, and Spirit all connected and working together, sharing love with each other and everyone. The Trinity is a model of how we can be together (through love) and work together with an outside focus. This brings us to the second theme. Building up the church is not ultimately only for the sake of the church, but *so that the world may know*. We are not to *become* the world, or *hide* from it, but serve it and *give ourselves away* for it as Christ did for us.

As in the Abram story, Jesus tells us the church exists for *those outside of itself*. More than telling, Jesus *models* this for us – as Christ did for us, we do for others, giving ourselves away for their sake. Jesus is praying for us, the church, to be on mission, to be set aside (sanctified) so that we can go back into the world. He is asking for our unity, for God's love to be in us *not* so we feel good and get to heaven, but so that people who do not belong to God

yet might come to know him. Jesus is not praying about my *individual* faith in God, he's praying about the picture the church *community* shows the world about what it means to belong to God. He wants that picture to be accurate. Jesus is sending us (the church) into the world to show how, through the love of Christ, we can live together with people who are not the same as us.

Matthew 28:16-20

As Jesus leaves his disciples for the last time, he reminds them of the most important parts of his teaching. The people of God are to make disciples – just as Jesus did. The church, therefore, must be actively replicating itself, not just in buildings and programs, but in the lives of the individuals both inside and outside the congregation. He tells them to baptize and teach – this is part of discipleship. Jesus is inviting us to enact his teaching bodily and learn to live it out, not just mentally agree. He also says that we will be doing this in all nations. This call is not limited to the current Christians, or even the current cultures in which the church finds itself, but God's desire is for everyone to be a part of his family. The final piece which is important to draw from this passage is that the church cannot be the church apart from Christ. Jesus ends this charge in Matthew by saying, "and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."⁶ Any group which attempts to follow the mission of God apart from the presence of God has missed the point of what it means to be the people of God.

6. Matthew 28:20.

Paul's Teaching

Ephesians 2:11-22

Turning to Paul, we find a beautiful picture of what God calls us to be in Christ. Paul elaborates on the image of the body of Christ, saying in Ephesians 2 that we are members of the household of God who through Christ “are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.”⁷ Paul is building on Jesus’ prayer that his followers would be one. In some ways, the entire book of Ephesians is an extended explanation of what it could look like for a community of people to be faithful to God. And here, in chapter 2, Paul leads up to this image of ‘God’s dwelling place’ by elaborating on the need for peace.

He says we are not called to divisions, dissension, and alienation from others. We are called to be a ‘household’ or ‘family.’ The animosity that crops up between groups who see themselves as separate from one another has been broken down through Christ. Because of the work Jesus did through his life, death, and resurrection, *all* have access to God, and *all* who follow him are joined together *in Christ*. In Christ, strangers become roommates, aliens become family. The people of God grow up *together* into God’s household, the very place Christ dwells on earth. Christ becomes the ‘peace’, ‘shalom’, that allows former enemies to work together for God’s mission.

Ephesians 4

Paul expands on the logistics of how we live together in Ephesians 4. The call to peace, the call to unity, the call to bear with each other in love, these are the hallmarks of what it

7. Ephesians 2:22.

means to be people of God. The goal of the people of God is that “speaking the truth in love, we must grow up *in every way* into him who is the head, into Christ.”⁸ Having maturity only in spiritual matters, while allowing immaturity in interpersonal issues, emotional health, and conflict resolution, is not the calling of what it means to be the people of God. Paul takes time in a book about the purpose of the church to talk so much about behaviors and attitudes, because it’s part of growing up. When we join Jesus, we are called to community. We are adopted into the family and caught up in the life of God, together. We do not get to pick our family. And yet, Paul’s teaching here should mark our interactions with each other: gentleness, humility, unity, and – above all – putting up with each other.

Theology of the Church

[Jesus] left no written code which should keep inviolate for all time the essential message, and the essential requirements for the due observance of His sacraments.... What he left behind was a fellowship, and He entrusted to it the task of being His representative to the world. “As the Father has sent me,” He said, “even so send I you.” ... He is present in His people.

—Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God*

The scripture paints for us a picture of how we can and should represent God within our given context. Though the culture around us in America today may be different than the culture that marked the time of scripture, the call of God does not change. God’s vision for his people is broad enough to allow for faithful adaptations whatever the surrounding culture. The biblical overview has illustrated how the call, or commission, of what it means to be the church consists

8. Ephesians 4:15.

of three facets: staying connected to God in unity, being formed together into the image of Christ, and pursuing God's mission in the world.

One in Christ

"Now ya'll are the body of Christ and individually members of it."⁹ At its most basic, the definition and purpose of the church is to be the body of Christ. "The whole core of biblical history is the story of the calling of a visible community to be God's own people."¹⁰ From the time of Abram till now, we are called together to be God's people. Paul states it this way: we are called to be God's dwelling place.¹¹ We show the world an image of what it means to be God's children, of what it means to belong to him. Belonging to God has at its essence two important practices – the presence of God, and unity with others.

The first part of our calling is the same as that of Jesus' call to his disciples: "to be with him."¹² We cannot be the people of God without his presence. This theme is clear in the Old Testament through the stories of exodus and exile. The theme is elaborated by Jesus in his prayer for his disciples that they are in him and he in them.¹³ When Jesus ends his earthly ministry by commissioning his disciples, he says "I am with you always."¹⁴

9. 1 Corinthians 12:27, with a 'southern' translation that brings the plural of 'you' through into English.

10. Newbigin, *The Household of God*, 27.

11. Ephesians 2:22.

12. Mark 3:14.

13. John 17:22.

14. Matthew 28:20.

Secondly, we are called to unity. In Christ, there are no divisions, but instead there is peace.¹⁵ We are called to love, and to put up with each other.¹⁶ When we are called to live in unity in Christ together, we are called with people who are very different. Unity in this setting must be more than just an aspiration. As Christina Cleveland says, “In theory, we support the vision of a diverse, integrated, and interdependent body of Christ, but we sure as heck don’t want to venture outside of our homogeneous churches to live the vision.”¹⁷ Let us face this head on: if we are in Christ we are stuck with one another, like it or not. The work of reconciling all these different groups together *inside* the body of Christ, when they are at odds *outside* of the body on issues like politics, race, etc., is incredibly hard work. “The work of reconciliation is often excruciating because it is the work of the Cross.”¹⁸ We can only live in unity if we rely on Christ to form us together in *his* shape and image. I will further explore these themes when we turn to the theology of difference.

15. Ephesians 2. This peace is not individual, internal in our hearts, but a peace of two warring factions learning to live together in unity.

16. Ephesians 4.

17. Christena Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces that Keep us Apart* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 177.

18. Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ*, 156. “The work of reconciliation is often excruciating because it is the work of the cross. If reconciliation work isn’t painful, I’d venture to say that it isn’t really reconciliation work. Reconciliation requires that we partner with equally imperfect individuals who are also clumsily scaling the cross cultural learning curve, forgive those who carelessly wrong us, repeatedly ask for forgiveness, engage in awkward and unpredictable situations and, like gluttons for punishment, keep coming back for more.”

Growing Together in Christ

The next facet of our calling is to be formed as a community into the image of Christ. As we bear with each other in love we are to grow up in every way into a dwelling place for God.¹⁹ Jesus speaks of this in the great commission when he sends us to make disciples. The church is, at its core, a group of people inviting everyone to join them to be formed into the image of Christ. You cannot be a Christian on your own. When you are caught up into the life of God, you are swept up *with others* and invited to grow together. This growth should lead an increased connection with God and increased unity within the body of Christ. However, it should also include drawing others who were once outside nearer to the life of God. In addition, discipleship communities who are growing are self-replicating. Growing communities will birth other growing communities, not cloning exact copies, but spinning out other discipleship communities who are also growing in Christ.

This growth is not just in belief or right thinking, it spills over into action and transformative life choices. Church at its best is action learning. You discuss together what God is doing, you try new things, reflect, learn, try some more. We see an example of this fleshed out in Luke 10. Ivan Illich states, “We can only *live* changes: we cannot think our way to humanity.”²⁰ The same is true for the church. We cannot think our way into formation in Christ. We must go beyond simply teaching ideas, to include *embodying* a new way of living in the world.

19. Ephesians 2 & 4.

20. Ivan Illich, *A Celebration of Awareness: A Call for Institutional Revolution*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1971), 3. Quoted in Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 101. Emphasis mine.

For the Sake of the World

The people of God have always existed as God's representatives to the world. We are gathered together, we are invited to grow up, and we are sent by God out on mission. As God called Abram to go, and promised he would be a blessing to others, so God sends us to bless the world. As the community in Jeremiah is sent to seek the welfare of the community they lived in, so we are sent to do the same. We are sent, like the disciples, to have authority to speak against strongholds, to be united together so that everyone would come to know how much God loves the world he created.²¹

God invites us to be his 'faithful presences within' the culture in which we find ourselves. Our purpose is to seek the *shalom* of everyone in every arena we find ourselves to be a part of. "When the church ceases to be one, or ceases to be missionary, it contradicts its own nature."²² We are called to be one and to be on mission in our specific time and context, so we can *seek the peace* of an increasingly disconnected, relativistic, consumeristic, and hyper-politicized world. In a culture that says you can have what you want for the right price, that says political power is the way to influence our culture, the followers of Jesus are called to be the united, faithful body of Christ, modeling a cruciform way of life.

We are called the body of Christ, but we can only *be* the body of Christ by the grace of God. We have not 'figured it out,' nor do we enact this calling in a way that could yet be considered competent. Paul says that we have not yet achieved this, but we press on to take

21. Mark 3; John 17.

22. Newbigin, *The Household of God*, 26.

hold of that which Christ has taken hold of me.²³ Similarly, the whole gathered church is not yet what God calls us to be. Just a quick look behind the scenes of any church would illuminate this truth. However, we are not the body of Christ because we are *already* a perfect image of Jesus in this world, we are his body because he has called us, and he is faithful to create us into people who can fulfill this calling. “In the perspective of (the) *eschaton*..., we wait in faith and hope, still involved in this sinful age and yet living by the mercy of God.”²⁴ Like Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3, we can only dimly see the shape of what God is transforming us into day by day as we seek to be with God, transformed through Christ, for the sake of the world.²⁵

Leadership within the Church

Now that we have a foundation for the nature and calling of the church, we can turn to seek an understanding of Christian leadership within this body. By its nature, this understanding must likewise come through a Spirit-filled engagement of scripture, and thoughtful reflection on our current context.

Biblical Foundation

Exodus 33, while not a traditional leadership text, has been pivotal in the formation of my theology of leadership. Following on the heels of the golden calf incident, we find the Lord sending the people of Israel on to the Promised Land with one caveat – he will not join them.

23. Philippians 3:12-14.

24. Newbigin, *The Household of God*, 133.

25. 2 Corinthians 3:18.

Moses' response to this shows that he has been meeting regularly with God, so often that he would be considered 'a friend' (v. 11). He argues for God's continued presence with the people, and God grants it. Moses' advocacy before God on behalf of the people who are following him is an important aspect of Christian leadership. The importance of a consistent relationship with God is also demonstrated. This intimacy with God cannot be faked, but only comes from a regular, ongoing, intentional time spent with God.

In Ezekiel 34 we hear the indictment of the shepherds, or leaders, of the Children of Israel. The shepherds have been using the sheep for their own gain. In reality, though, the sheep (the children of Israel) belong to God and have only been given to the leaders so they can care for their spiritual and physical wellbeing. This passage illustrates how leaders in the church will be judged not on how well they perform, or how well fed the leaders become, but only on how well they care for the sheep in their charge. Within the church of God, the people we are called to serve are meant for God's praise, God's gain, God's benefit – not for ours. Sheep are still sheep and exist for a purpose outside their own happiness. Those called and gifted for leadership of the sheep are meant to steward the people they are serving, to build them up to be used for God's purposes, not destroy them in the process of their own gain. As a friend of mine once said, this passage highlights the first rule of shepherding: don't eat the sheep!

Moving to the New Testament, we must begin with Jesus' own teaching on leadership. In Luke 22 when he's celebrating the Passover with his disciples, he says 'here is my body, I've given it for you.' Soon after his disciples begin to argue about who will be the greatest in the kingdom of God. Jesus turns it into a teachable moment. Jesus says leaders in this world exploit and demean those they serve. They gather and hoard power, not sharing it with anyone. He

calls the ones with the *exousia* (power/authority) benefactors. Benefactors in their culture operate out of a scarcity mindset, as if power, voice, and authority are limited resources. This mindset says, “If I give some of my leadership to you, I will have less.”

We don’t have to look far to see examples of this kind of ‘leadership’ in our world. But in response to this, Jesus says “NOT SO WITH YOU!” When we join the kingdom of God, we are given a different option for how to use our power. Rather than serve myself at the expense of others, we are invited to give our power away. Jesus invites the leaders in his kingdom to be in the world as one who serves. Because in the kingdom of God, power, voice, authority is not a limited resource; when we give it away, it multiplies. This theme of Jesus using his power by giving it away is also captured in Paul’s exposition of it in Philippians 2. There, Paul is reflecting on the radical nature of what Jesus has done for us. Paul invites us to have the same mind in us that was in Jesus. Do not consider what God has done for us to be a thing we use to exploit others, but instead we humble ourselves, and become obedient at any cost.

Ephesians 4:1-16 teaches further about the nature of the church and the role of leaders within it. The call to peace, the call to unity, the call to bear with each other in love are the hallmarks of what it means to be people of God. The goal of this people of God is “speaking the truth in love, we must grow up *in every way* into him who is the head, into Christ.”²⁶ Within this arena of ‘God’s people’ the leaders are the ones who are actively equipping others to be engaged in the business of building up the body of Christ. Paul says: “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, *to equip the saints for the work of ministry*, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the

26. Ephesians 4:15.

unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.”²⁷ The leaders in the church of God are not the only ones called to be about the work of God. Christian leaders encourage, train, and equip the entire body of Christ to be about the work and mission to which God has called us.

Shared Leadership

Living out the call of Christ in the world must also take place within a *community* of people who are engaging the mission of God in all aspects of their communal and individual lives. I do not see evidence for a ‘one-man army’ type of leadership in either the Old or New Testament. Moses is invited by his father-in-law to delegate and share his authority.²⁸ Even David can only serve the needs of the kingdom with a team of leaders helping him.²⁹ Jesus sends his disciples out in twos.³⁰ We are built for community, and this is even more vital in church leadership. You cannot fulfill the call of God to make disciples on your own, it is best to lead in community.

Working in teams, leaders can model for the larger group a type of integration where discipleship, service, evangelism, worship, and life together are all intertwined. When we work together, the effect will be a body of Christ built up, learning together what it means to live a life worthy of God – in our homes, our jobs, our neighborhoods. The leadership team is not the

27. Ephesians 4:11-13.

28. Exodus 18.

29. 2 Samuel 8:15-18.

30. Luke 10.

sole agent of change, but a catalyst for change in the church community that can result in increasing influence amongst the people and cultures around them.

Tod Bolsinger, in his book *Canoeing the Mountains*, suggests these partnerships should include people who might not have typically been encompassed within the walls of the church. If we are moving as a church into new territory (perhaps an ethnic demographic, or LGBT, etc.) we can be more effective by partnering with a guide for whom that territory is not 'new' but is instead 'home.'³¹ This idea will be further explored later when we talk about hospitality and power.

Conceiving of leadership as a shared task may not be a novel idea in church history, but it is uniquely matched to the changing context around us. To understand why this is the case, I would like to look briefly at Acts 16, which I believe is a vision of how the church could function in our present setting.

Paul has a vision of a man in Macedonia. In response to his vision, the church sends a group to Macedonia to see what God might be doing. When they arrive, instead of finding a man, they find a group of women who are meeting regularly and hungry for the word of God. They meet with the women, and a woman named Lydia is baptized along with her whole family. Out of this a new church is planted. The church in Acts was growing, adapting and thriving in a context that was at best indifferent to its presence and at worst openly antagonistic.

Here in Acts 16 we witness the leadership of a team who is bringing their gifts together to respond to their context and to God's movement in their midst. As a result of the church's

31. Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Leading into Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2015), 191.

flexibility, their accurate read of the context, and response to good leadership, a new work of God begins in Macedonia. The church highlighted here was a growing, thriving church, able to adapt to the situation in which they find themselves. They remained connected to the Spirit of God through prayer and were willing to change and respond as the Spirit led. They were open to what they found in the community around them, rather than expecting the community to conform to their culture. They could read and react to the context in a way that was faithful to the message of Christ. We do not live in Macedonia, but our churches can strive for these same marks. They remained connected to God, growing into his image, and were willing to be sent to their surrounding community. Through this church's faithful presence, God began a new work in Macedonia.

With these scriptures in mind, I will briefly summarize the theology of Christian leadership that undergirds this thesis-project. Foundational to any theology of leadership is that *God* is the shepherd of his church. We all are his people, and together we form an image of the Body of Christ that allows the world to see what it means to belong to God. The head of the church is Christ, we serve as under-shepherds. The leader's role in this context is to build up Jesus' disciples so the whole church can be engaged in the work of more fully embracing the call of God to make disciples as we go (Matthew 28). Through caring deeply for the congregation, leaders help all involved to learn more about God, others, themselves and the context in which we find ourselves. Discipleship (being formed into the image of Christ) happens within both individuals and the community only when we are a unified body of Christ.

A Christian leader serves at the invitation of Christ and only through his example. We do not gather or hoard power and authority and wield it for our own sake. By Jesus' example, we

give away power, authority, and share leadership, being the primary servant among the people of God, encouraging them to serve others in a similar way.

Formation into the *image* of God for the world cannot happen without the *presence* of God in our midst. The Spirit of God is necessary and active through scripture, prayer, and individual and communal reflection. The leader must remain anchored in God's presence and invite the church to do the same. As Exodus 33 reminds us, we cannot be the people of God without God himself living among us. Christian leaders serve under the headship of Christ and, with his help, his church can be formed into a worthy image of what it means to belong to God. Leaders serve the church at the request and with the sustenance of God. Christian leaders follow the example of Christ in serving rather than seeking to be served. Because of the ever-changing landscape within which we are called to serve, leadership works best as a team of leaders who model for their congregation a willingness to listen for and answer the promptings of God however unusual they may be. Each member has been designed uniquely to fit within the body of Christ, each part serves a function (1 Corinthians 12). As everyone within the church leans in to their unique giftings, the church can find itself well equipped to be responsive to God's movement in their midst and in their community. When we show the world an accurate image of what it means to be loved by God it cannot help but draw all the world to desire to join this unity of diverse persons who are being created into the body of Christ.

Final Thoughts on Church and Leadership

The church is still called to faithfulness, even in an ever-shifting, ever-diversifying culture. This faithfulness consists of staying connected to God in unity, being formed together

into the image of Christ, and pursuing God's mission in community. The changes within the American culture in the last 60-100 years might feel, to some, like a major loss. It might feel like we have been taken from a known land, dragged against our will into a climate that seems, at its best indifferent to our presence, and at worst openly antagonistic. In this way, we share an experience with our brothers and sisters in the book of Jeremiah, the book of Acts, and throughout history.

God's call to us remains the same as it has been from the time of the Old Testament until now. It is as if God says to us, even today: *That place in which you find yourself is the place I have called you to be. I still call you to be about my father's business, right where you are. Stay connected to me, seek the shalom of your environment, make disciples, show others what it means to be my children. You may not like the place you are, but I sent you there. Now get to work.*

Themes of Diversity in Scripture

Biblical Overview

God's design for difference and diversity is woven into the entirety of scripture from Genesis through Revelation. We can trace this thread through creation, fall, redemption, and restoration.

Creation

Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.... So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.... God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

—Genesis 1:26a, 27, 31

From the earliest parts of the creation story, we see God building into the fabric of our world a diversity of species, both plant and animal. When God ushers humanity on to the cosmic stage, God does not limit himself to only humans of one type, but instead creates two – male and female. The triune God, who is in himself a community, intends for people to *be in* and *a part of* a community, which is varied, not uniform.

In the first chapter of Genesis the truth is shown – an assortment of humanity has been a part of our world from the very beginning. We tend to equate conflict with sin and the fall. But conflict is simply “the tension we experience when a difference is discovered.”³² God the creator put variety into creation with intentionality and labeled that variety ‘very good.’ It is very good that I would bump up against others who are not the same as me, who stretch me in ways that might at times be challenging. It is very good that my view of the world is not the only or ‘right’ one. It is very good that our differences create space for us to grow as individuals and a community. If we consider conflict at its basic level to be any tension that comes from differences, then conflict in itself is not sin, though our reactions to conflict might be sinful.³³ When sin enters the equation, everything becomes more complicated, including the conflicts that come as part of the differences among us.

Fall

The Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. And the Lord said, “Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be

32. Carolyn Schrock-Shenk and Lawrence Ressler, eds. *Making Peace with Conflict: Practical Skills for Conflict Transformation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1999), 23.

33. John Paul Lederach, *Reconcile: Conflict Transformation for Ordinary Christians* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2014), 67.

impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech."

—Genesis 11:5-7

The narrative of the fall begins in Genesis 3 where we see a break in relationship as parties in conflict *move away* from each other instead of *toward* each other. The results of this 'fall' bring hardship to individuals and the communities of which they are a part. The results of this break in relationship are felt on an individual, and a systemic communal level. In Genesis 11, the story of the Tower of Babel heightens this. The movement away from relationship continues and differences start to bring confusion instead of strength.

Individuals no longer start with an assumption of understanding because of the sin that influences our conflicts. We see the actions of another and do not know why they act the way they do. We often fill in our gaps of knowledge with misinformation, which compounds the confusion. Misunderstanding creates a false image of the other to which we react and respond. We may as well be speaking different languages for the amount of comprehension which passes between. The Fall effects the ways in which we handle our differences with others. Differences that were created by God to strengthen relationships now become walls to understanding.

One final thing to reflect on from this passage. God is the one who chooses to diversify the languages of the people at the tower of Babel. In response to their desire to "make a name for" themselves, and in order to save them from themselves, God increases the diversity and difference that already existed in creation.³⁴ Then, in chapter 12, he sends Abram to go be a

34. Genesis 11:4.

blessing to this increasingly diverse humanity so that God's name can be made great through him. The increased diversity is part of God's answer to our desire to elevate ourselves, and through a diverse humanity God can be made known.

Redemption

In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.

—Ephesians 2:13-14

Thankfully, the salvation narrative and the biblical narrative do not end with the wall remaining in our midst. Through the work of God in Christ, the things that divide us have been torn down and replaced with true and lasting peace. Here in Ephesians 2 we see the incredible story of the Jews and gentiles, who were at odds with each other, separated by a literal and figurative wall, being brought together by the work of Jesus. Two groups merge into one. Strangers become family. Aliens become members of the household of God. People from both sides are formed together into God's household, the very place Christ dwells on earth.

The same differences and conflicts that *through sin* can cause such misunderstanding and division can be redeemed *through Christ* to draw us closer to each other and to God. Regardless of who the people 'near' to you want to call 'far off' and 'alien,' the good news is the same for all. Division, dissension, alienation and wall-building are not the calling of the people of God. We are called together to be a diverse household, a family, a dwelling place for God.

Restoration

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

—Ephesians 4:1-6

The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

—John 17:22-23

When the walls of sin and separation come down, the people of God can get to work. As Paul tells us in Ephesians the work is clear – bear with each other in love, maintain peace. He is not advocating a false peace that comes from ignoring the conflicts within our communities. As a diverse community, Paul is urging us to live out our call to be peacemakers – who disturb the false peace around them for the sake of the kingdom of God.³⁵

The mission of the people of God should not result in isolation from the different people around them. The walls of separation have come down to allow everyone access to the gifts of God. Likewise, building up unity in the church is not only for the church's sake, but ultimately so 'that the world may know' that God sent us. We are not to become the world or hide from it. We are called to serve the world and give ourselves away for it as Christ did for us. The church must fully embrace the task of becoming the people of God, as we are the dwelling place of God on earth. We are the image for the world of what it means to belong to him. The picture

35. Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash a Revolution in Your Life in Christ* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 184.

we are called to paint is one of unity, one of peace, one of different people able to be in fellowship together around the same mission.

This overview of scripture shows how diversity and difference has been part of God's intention from creation through the restoration of all things. This is illustrated for us when we watch the processions of praise in the book of Revelation where we find people from "every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne."³⁶ God's heart for his Church is compelling – a widely varied gathering of humanity who can live in peace and work together on the same mission: to fulfill our calling to be God's image in the world.

Differences within the Church

The brief overview of the narrative of scripture shows God's heart for a diverse human creation. With this background firmly in mind, we turn now to the ways this diversity plays out within the life and mission of God's church. The key texts shared here give a framework for the people of God to consider their role in the world.

A Diverse People for the Sake of Others: Our Calling

Go from your country...to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation ... in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

—Genesis 12:1-3

From the very beginning of the story, God's people are a people on the move. In this text, God tells Abram to GO from every familiar thing to some unknown place that will be shown later. To Abram's credit, he goes. God declares that Abram's family will become a great

36. Revelation 7:9.

nation, and not only will they be blessed, but through them, “all the families of the earth” will be blessed. From the start, God did not intend to bless his people simply for their own sake. God’s plan from the beginning was to bless the whole world through his people, every diverse group and part of that diverse world. What blessings we receive we are to freely share.

Jesus’ final words to his disciples before ascending into heaven both point to the same mission that God gave to Abram: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.”³⁷ God’s people are on the move, called to exist for the sake of others. Specifically, Jesus calls us to witness to and disciple people who are not yet ‘among’ us. It’s no small thing that we are called to ALL nations and ‘the ends of the earth.’³⁸ This calling enlarges our circle of whom we consider ‘inside’ our sense of responsibility (everyone) and whom we consider ‘outside’ (no one). However, our churches do not always reflect this sense of looking beyond ourselves. Our tendency is to make decisions about what makes the ‘stakeholders’ happy (the folks who are already coming.) But our clear call from scripture is to ‘Go!’

In a wonderful extended scene in the book of Revelation, chapters 5-8, John weeps to see that no one is worthy to open the scroll. When the elder points out that there is one, the ‘Lion of the Tribe of Judah,’ who is worthy, they sing a new song saying, “You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from *every tribe and language and people and nation*.”³⁹

After the tribes of Judah have been counted off, John looks around and he sees “a great

37. Matthew 28:19.

38. Acts 1:8

39. Revelation 5:9.

multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages,”⁴⁰ which reflects the people the Lamb has ransomed. This image reflects the Palm Sunday narrative in the gospels showing a diverse multitude worshiping the Lamb with palm branches in their hands. The tribes of Israel are there, but as God told Abram in Genesis 12, they were blessed to be a blessing to ALL the nations, and ALL nations are represented. When we are pursuing our calling to ‘go’ as God calls us to go, we will bless everyone, and call all nations, tribes, tongues and peoples to join us in our calling. When we live out our calling to go and bless others our gatherings will begin to reflect this worship gathering. The one who is worthy is coming, and EVERYONE is invited to the celebration.

Seek the Peace and Show Mercy: Dealing with Diversity

Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

—Jeremiah 29:7

When Jeremiah was writing, many Israelites were living in Babylon and trying to figure out, ‘what does life look like now?’ They were in an unfamiliar place, surrounded by the people who had conquered them, and they were receiving conflicting messages from different prophets. Some were saying, ‘you won’t have to stay long,’ and others were saying, ‘get used to it there.’ Then the Lord spoke to Jeremiah again, “Build, make families, multiply, seek the welfare,” etc. Culturally Jerusalem and Babylon were very different – different religions, different political systems, and different ways of life. Community was hard work even under the best circumstances – when everyone was able to ‘opt in,’ wanted to be there, and had control

40. Revelation 7:9-10.

over whether they stayed or went.

But the Israelites did not have those options. They had been forcibly dragged from their homes, sent to a place that was foreign and unfamiliar, told they would be there for some unknown amount of time and God was inviting them to create community anyways. God was inviting them as a faith family to create community with the very people who just led them into exile. As Christians, this is the kind of ‘shalom’ or ‘welfare’ we are invited to create as well. Wherever we find ourselves, God has sent us there and we are to pursue peace in those places. We are to seek the ‘welfare’ even of the people who have done us wrong.

In Luke 10, a lawyer speaks to Jesus as he seeks to discover just how far his sphere of responsibility must extend. He asks Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” He seems to want Jesus to define for him an ‘in group’ and an ‘out group.’⁴¹ Who do I have to care for, and whom can I write off? Jesus turns this question on its head when he sets up a Samaritan, someone who is considered by many Israelites to be inferior, as the example of what it means to be a neighbor. Even the language shift is significant. The lawyer asks about the noun form of neighbor, which person or persons is included in this category of ‘neighbor’? Jesus answers by asking about the verb form, who is ACTING in a neighborly way? The lawyer can’t even seem to bring himself to say, “the Samaritan”, so he answers by saying “the one who shows mercy.” Jesus ends the conversation with a command to go and do likewise. The Samaritan in this story is less concerned with categorizing who is in and who is out of his circle of responsibility, and more

41. Cleveland shares research on ‘in groups’ vs. ‘outgroups’ (or us vs. them), *Disunity in Christ*, 50ff. She says that research shows that simply by changing the way we categorize people – by including ‘them’ as part of ‘us’ – it can have significant positive impacts. Conversely, when we consider some folks as ‘outsiders’ we automatically treat them worse.

concerned with how he can “act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with his God.”⁴² We are told to do the same.

The lawyer’s primary question that begins this parable points us back to our mission, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ Jesus expands on the ‘love God, love others’ summary of the gospel by expanding our sense of mission to include any and all who come in our path in need of mercy. God has already extended this mercy to us, and commands us to go and extend mercy to everyone, being neighborly regardless of how similar or different they are from us.

God’s Diverse Dinner Party

And as he sat at dinner in Levi’s house, many tax-collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many who followed him.

—Luke 2:15

This verse in Mark comes right after Jesus called some of his disciples. I love the picture it shows of what it looked like to follow Jesus; it was somewhat messy. Can you imagine these particular people hanging out in any other situation? Fishermen, tax collectors, studied students of the scriptures, known sinners. Groups of people who don’t hang out anywhere else, lounging around with Jesus, being shaped by focusing on him instead of their own individual agendas. A diverse people who share meals, work through conflict, and above all pursue Jesus and his calling together as the body of Christ.

This idea speaks against the misuse of holiness that would separate us from others. “Holiness is not something limited to the ‘religious’ sphere. Being holy is about being engaged in a pattern of activity as a part of a community in the messiness and particularity of that

42. Micah 6:8.

community's social context."⁴³ As a community 'set apart' (or holy) for God's intentions, we are not separated from the world. Instead, we are deeply engaged in the messiness and unpredictability of the world and friendships there.

Jesus didn't gather a group of people who were all the same as himself and each other. This beautiful assorted dinner party is a picture of what our church could become. When we journey with Jesus, we are together in Christ with others we might not have chosen to journey with. We are family. Part of the work of the calling to be the children of God is learning to be family with people we may not have chosen to hang out with otherwise. Above all, the work is allowing Christ to form us into his image and send us into the world with his love.

Power and Hospitality in the Kingdom of God

In our culture, we tend to think about hospitality as a way of balancing scales. When someone invites us to dinner, we feel almost obligated to invite them back. I scratch your back so someday you will scratch mine. Offering food or support becomes a way of gaining and using power. We accept hospitality from someone and add it to the 'list' of what we now owe them.

Within the church we talk about offering hospitality as a way of responding to the love of God. However, we cannot talk about hospitality without talking about power. If we're not intentional about how we use our power within and through hospitality, we will *unintentionally* reflect values around power that do not align with the kingdom of God. Even in scripture, hospitality and power are more deeply linked than we care to admit. Throughout the gospels, we find conversations about power being held alongside a hosted dinner. We also see Jesus

43. Andy Johnson, *Holiness and the Missio Dei* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016), 188.

using hospitality language to help his disciples understand the right use of power within the kingdom of God.

In order to think through the biblical and theological understandings of these themes will need to start by recognize our own power then move to Jesus' invitation to give our power away. I will end with reflections of Luke 10 as a framework that can help us walk through the interplay of power and hospitality within the church on mission.

Recognition of Power

Power can be conceived of in a variety of ways. In the context of this thesis-project, we are not talking about physical strength, but instead of the "possession of control, authority, or influence over" one's self and those around us.⁴⁴ Within the church, as in the larger culture, there are power dynamics at play that often go unnoticed. These dynamics are shaped and formed by the general milieu of the environment in which the church finds itself. Within my local church, the power dynamics are influenced by the ways in which power is granted and used within the culture of the Northeastern United States.

The power granted in the American context is given for some things that can be changed, and for some that cannot. Authority and control given to those whose skin is white, who are male, and who speak a certain language (English) is granted without any work on the part of that person. Power given for age, education level, or financial independence is power that can either be granted, taken away, or changed over time. Though not everyone has power

44. "Power," *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, accessed February 8, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/power>.

in *every* situation, it can be argued that everyone has some degree of power in at least *certain* settings. For example, a child who has no power or authority to effect change in their own home can yield power over another child on the playground.

Power as a resource is something we're taught to gain and hoard. We learn even at young ages to use it to increase our standing, often by decreasing the standing of others. We operate out of a sense of scarcity, as if *you* gaining power decreases the power *I* have. We circle the wagons when we gain some small amount, not allowing anyone to share in our increased power. Often, the people with the most power use it in abusive ways to exploit people who have little voice of their own.

The scriptural stories are not immune from the misuse of power. Even our biblical heroes chose to use their power in ways that negatively impacted those in their care. Abram and Sarai used their power over Hagar to force her to bear Abram's child, and then mistreated her once she became pregnant.⁴⁵ King David misused his power to sleep with Bathsheba, then killed her husband Uriah to cover it up.⁴⁶ There are many other biblical examples we do not have time to explore. The question in front of us, for the sake of this thesis-project, is not who has the power, or how much power do we have. Instead, I am seeking to help my congregation wrestle with how we are invited to use the power we *do have*, even if it's only situational power, when we begin to follow Jesus and join the kingdom of God.

45. Genesis 16.

46. 2 Samuel 11.

Giving Power Away

A full-scale survey of the biblical themes of power and hospitality is not possible within the scope of this project. Instead, I wish to anchor our understanding of the right use of power in Jesus' teaching in the gospels and Paul's teaching in the epistles.

Luke 22

In Luke 22, Jesus is hosting a dinner party for his disciples at the time of the Passover. Jesus knows he will be betrayed. He knows he is going to die. Despite knowing all this, when the time for the Passover feast comes, Jesus 'takes his place at the table.' He gathers his closest acquaintances together and serves as the head of the household for this Passover feast. There, in this hospitality setting, they discuss the right use of power in the kingdom of God.

Jesus tells them he looked forward to this final meal with his disciples. He says he wanted to do this 'before I suffer.' The stage for this dinner feast is somewhat grim. It begins with the prediction of his suffering and ends with a betrayal that leads to his death.

Jesus serves the meal anyway. He names the bread and wine an example of his upcoming actions. He says his body will be broken, but he also says those actions are 'for you.' Jesus is intentionally shaping the meal to illustrate the way in which he will give himself away on the cross. He's offering this gift, this act of hospitality for the people he's hosting, which includes his friends as well as his betrayer.

The disciples do not yet know who that betrayer will be. They start wondering, guessing, and even arguing. Not surprisingly the conversation and disputing shifts from 'who would do this?' to 'who's the best?' They cannot see within themselves the potential to betray Jesus, so

instead they begin to argue who is the best among them. The disciples have been following Jesus around, but their sense of identity, their values, and their ways of relating to the world have not yet been fully shaped by the kingdom of God.

What an interesting contrast: Jesus, their teacher, mentor, leader, has just modeled for them that he's giving his life away for their sake, and they are arguing about who is the greatest?! Jesus shows them they should empty themselves, and all they can think about is how following Jesus will work to their advantage!

In response, Jesus teaches explicitly that the ones with authority should give their power away. We looked at this passage briefly in the previous section on leadership, but it is worth revisiting it here again in this setting in more detail. Jesus says the kings of the world lord their authority over those who follow, whom he calls benefactors. A benefactor is someone who permits some of their gathered resources to be given to someone else as a token. But the wealth, the authority, the power all stays with the benefactor. This puts the one with fewer resources in the debt of the one with more. R. Alan Culpepper rightly said, "The gifts given are often a charade in which the oppressed are forced to praise the generosity of their oppressors."⁴⁷

Outside the kingdom of God, people use their power to further themselves and exploit others, but within the kingdom it should not be this way. The world invites us to use what little power we have to gain more advantage, security, wealth, status for ourselves. But Jesus invites us to the table of his hospitality and says: "But *not so with you*. ... I am among you as the one

47. R. Alan Culpepper, "The Gospel of Luke," in *Luke John*, The New Interpreter's Bible, vol. 9 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 424.

who serves.”⁴⁸ He says it with his words, with the illustration of the broken bread at the Passover supper, and then he lives it with his broken body on the cross.

Through Jesus’ hospitality, we get a glimpse into the way he uses the power he’s been given. He has authority that comes from being God, but he also has authority that comes of being a male Jewish teacher. And for all of the power he has, he puts it aside and says, ‘I give myself for you.’ In God’s kingdom, power is not a limited resource and just like the bread at the last supper, when we bless it and give it away God will multiply and make room for everyone to join us. As children of God we follow Jesus’ example to humble ourselves and literally give our lives away for the sake of Jesus’ kingdom.

Ephesians Household Codes

Building on Jesus’ understanding of power, Paul adapts the household codes in the book of Ephesians. The Ephesian Christians hearing this letter were ruled by the Roman government. The way households were run was largely influenced and determined by this rule. The Roman government had a set of household codes known as the “*Patria Potestas*” – which literally means the ‘power of the father.’⁴⁹

These codes established the father’s power as *Pater Familias* (or head of the household) over everything and everyone within the household – wife, children, freedmen, clients, and slaves. It was the father’s duty to ensure that everyone within his household upheld the Roman law and grew to be a good citizen. There were quite a few philosophers and teachers around

48. Luke 22:26a, 27b, emphasis mine.

49. Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 551. See Ephesians 5:21-33.

the same time as Jesus and Paul who would write about these household codes and give frameworks for how the *Pater Familias* was to use his power, and what kind of response the people under his authority should have to it.

When Paul is writing this section of Ephesians, he's writing with these household codes in mind. The codes would be familiar to his audience. His audience was aware that he's not *creating* something for them to adopt. He's *adapting* a structure that already exists! Paul is working within the societal structures available in his day to say something else entirely. In Luke 22 Jesus acted as 'head of household' for the Passover feast. In adapting these household codes, Paul took seriously Jesus' claim that those in power should give it away for the sake of the one they serve. For many of us, Paul did not go far enough for our modern sensibilities, as we would rather he *abolish* these codes rather than *adapt* them. However, it is not imperative that we *adopt* the codes, even as written by Paul. Instead, understanding the ways he *adapted* them for his listeners helps us consider how to adapt our current structural power codes (whether written or otherwise) that we are expected to use in our own setting.

Paul starts in Ephesians 5:21 by giving us an anchor for understanding the ways he adapts the codes. The language literally says 'put yourselves under' one another out of reverence for Christ. Paul reminds us that Christ is the head of our house, we all submit to him first, and only submit to others out of reverence to him.

Paul then walks through three main parts of the household codes and explains what submitting looks in the kingdom of God with Christ as our *Pater Familias*. He says women are subject to their husbands but because Christ is over them both, not because of the Roman power dynamic. Paul takes it even further by including instructions for how the ones with

power in this relationship, given by the Roman codes and society, should treat those without.

To them he says, “love your wives, and give yourselves *up* for them just like Christ did for us”! In the kingdom of God – where Christ is the head of all – there is a mutuality, rather than domination.

When Paul turns to parents/children in chapter 6, he says similar things. In the kingdom of God, it’s not enough for the powerless ones (the kids) to obey their parents. The ones in power are invited to consider the ones they serve. We see this same mutuality in the third pairing as well, masters/slaves. For Paul’s culture, husbands, masters, fathers all had power and positional authority while wives, children, slaves had none. In all three pairs, the way Paul adapts the codes leads to the same message. As members of the kingdom of God, Christ is the head of all, therefore we are to serve everyone, especially those below us in the power structure. Working within the societal structures of his day, Paul is reminding us that the people who are assigned power by society are not necessarily the most powerful in God’s eyes.

In God’s family, we have a new *Pater Familias* – a new head of the household that is Christ. Because of this, the appropriate use of power is not determined by our society and government. It’s not determined by rules and regulations and the structures we’ve inherited. *It’s determined by the way power was used on the cross* – our power is meant to *pour itself out* in love for others.

Hospitality as a Way Forward

We have now explored briefly the issues of power and a biblical and theological framework that invites us to give our power. What is left to explore is how this relates to hospitality within the mission of the people of God in the world.

As the church gathers, our tendency is to create spaces in which we feel comfortable. This dovetails nicely with the findings in sociology that people feel more contented with others who are most like them. It also seems to agree with the ‘homogeneous unit’ principle of church growth. Similarly, in the seeker sensitive movement churches started thinking about ways to be more ‘hospitable’ *within* the church to those who were not yet among us. Nothing is inherently wrong with either of these principles on their own. However, problems arise when they become the sole *modus operandi* for the way we engage in mission, discipleship, and evangelism within a church.

The great commission is a familiar verse for any church leader, “Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁰ In theory, this passage should determine the mission of our church both globally, and locally. However, there’s another passage that I think has become the unofficial motto of the gathered people of God when it comes to engaging this mission: “Let the little children come to me.”⁵¹ We even tend to design our worship service as if we could ‘draw’ people to us if we would only have the right programming, or the right music, or ‘welcome’ them in just the right way. We assume there are large groups of people who have some church knowledge, who are actively seeking God in their life, and if we just ‘build it they will come.’ I had a professor in seminary who calls it the Little Bo Peep version of evangelism – “leave them alone and they’ll come home.”⁵²

50. Matthew 28:19.

51. Matthew 19:14.

52. Thank you, Jim Singleton for this idea.

The interplay of power and hospitality needs to affect the ways we go on mission. If we are always the ones setting the table, we have the most power in any relationship. When we are the sole host, we define culture, set expectations, and expect others to conform to the atmosphere we have set. If we're sent to be on mission, but all we ever do is 'set a table for them to come,' we may not see the results we would like, even if that table is impressive and welcoming. Jesus came among us as one who serves, and has sent us out, inviting us to give our power away to make space for others at the table. This should translate into the way we live out his invitation to 'Go into all the world.' Jesus' invitation to mission starts with a method of hospitality that engages his call to use power for the kingdom's sake. To explore this further let us turn to Luke 10.

Luke 10:1-11

Jesus starts this passage by setting the stage for why we are being sent. He says, 'look around you. Many people are ready to hear and so few people are ready to go!' We are invited to ask the Lord of the harvest to send workers. Ultimately, if God is not sending, we should stay put. Jesus helps us to see the need in the world, we respond by asking God to send folks to take care of the need. We recognize that someone needs to go, and we just hope it's someone else.

We ask him to send someone to address this need, and he responds by sending us. "Go on your way, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves."⁵³ I am not comforted by that way of sending. A lamb in the midst of a wolf pack is defenseless, vulnerable. Jesus is saying, just as the lamb is vulnerable in the midst of a pack of wolves, so will you be when you

53. Luke 11:3.

GO. Jesus knew we would feel uncomfortable and vulnerable when we go on mission. He sends us out this way, but he does not send us alone. We go in pairs (v. 1), and we go at the invitation and by the sustenance of his Spirit. When we go on Jesus' mission, we take nothing with us – no purse, no bag, no sandals. We are sent into the world vulnerably, and empty-handed.

We've been sent by Jesus to go in a vulnerable position to answer the need of the world around us. We would rather be in positions of power than helplessness. We may respond to our perceived weakness by fight, or flee, or freeze. It feels threatening to have people around us with more power or more control than we have. But Jesus says, 'I'm sending you as lambs among wolves.' And he shows us through his life what that can look like – as he gives himself up to the point of death. But he also knows that the best way to share the message of a God who loves us so much he would give up his own power, is to go in a powerless position.

In verse 7, Jesus gives instructions for what we do when we are received. We are to remain in the house, receiving the food they provide. Jesus is not asking us to focus on how hospitable we are to others. We are not sent as hosts to receive the world as our guests. Jesus sends us to be the *guests* on their turf. Jesus is inviting us to take hospitality to the next level. When we follow Jesus to a life on mission, we become the guest in someone else's comfort zone. It means that the hosts, the people to whom we're taking God's message, get to *set the context* for where we will live out God's mission. This goes against what I thought it meant to share Christ with others. Growing up, I gleaned this idea that being on mission meant to *speak*, and maybe to *give* to the needs of others. Here, Jesus says my people on my mission start by *receiving* the hospitality of the people to whom I'm sending them.

This passage is not a prescription for a specific experience we must have when following God on mission. The invitation is not for modern Christians to hitchhike across or between towns. Instead, this passage illustrates a *posture* with which we enter the world. Instead of always hosting on our turf (e.g. inside our churches), we find spaces others are hosting in our community and receive from them instead. As an example, maybe rather than starting an open mic night in our church as a way to meet people far from God, we choose to join one happening at a local restaurant.

As a follower of Christ, the most hospitable thing I can do is learn to work through my discomfort to allow someone else to become my host. Only in that vulnerable posture can we give what we have received and speak of the kingdom of God. When we are receiving the hospitality of others, we can give generously out of the abundance that God has given us.⁵⁴ As he brought healing and forgiveness to us, we offer the same to the people who host us in their lives. We also speak the good news of the kingdom with a simple opening message: God has come near to me – he comes near to you too.

Conclusion

Being someone else's guest is not always comfortable work, but it is ultimately the work of the kingdom. When God sends us on mission, we do not get to set the agenda, or the culture, or the table. As God's family we're sent into the world with no fancy resources, no power, in a vulnerable position to be guests in someone else's comfort zone. Not discomfort for discomfort's sake, but so that others can have an opportunity to join God's family. We can only

54. Luke 11:9.

follow the call of God on our lives as individuals and a community as we are willing to follow Jesus' *example* to set aside our power, comfort, and authority. We are offered the sacred gift of the ability to enter the lives of the people around us in response to the invitation of the Spirit. God is already at work there. We don't 'bring Jesus' to anyone, we follow Jesus to everyone.

God invites us to 'go' on mission back into our own lives. This happens with an open to the Spirit, receiving the hospitality of others, and responsive to the lives of others. As in Luke 10, the harvest of our neighborhoods, the harvest of our communities is plentiful. Jesus asks us to pray that God would send people to call the world into his kingdom, and he has sent us. The church enters the world as God's voice and ambassadors, in the exact posture Jesus was sent to us. Not taking power for granted as something to be exploited; instead giving it away, creating space for *others to host us*. God calls his church to enter these spaces humbly, vulnerably, at the Spirit's direction. The church exists to give itself away, so that everyone can join the family of God.

The Lynn Church of the Nazarene has a great desire to reach their community and continue existing as an expression of the kingdom of God in this place. However, the way forward will not be simply to create a more hospitable place within our church for others when or if they decide to come. Serving in a community that is as ethnically, economically, educationally, and linguistically diverse as our city is, those in leadership in the church must also be willing to give up the power that we are given by our culture to allow people who are different than us to share the shaping of our gathered community of faith. Additionally, we must be willing and able to enter the comfort zones of others in response to the Spirit, as God

sends us vulnerably to receive their hospitality. Only there we will be able to share the truth that the kingdom of God has come near to us and desires them to come near as well.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Exploring power and hospitality as a motif to affect change in the sense of identity and attitudes towards those who are 'other' is a multifaceted endeavor. To do this well the support and counsel of resources from a variety of disciplines is needed. A literature review for a thesis-project of this scope and nature cannot account for everything written on the variety of subject matters included within its purview. Instead, most influential books will be highlighted from three broad theological categories to help give a sense of the scope of books available within. Further sources on these subject arenas will be included in the bibliography for those wishing to engage more on these topics.

The first broad theological category is resources for Christian leadership, emphasizing both discipleship and the process of congregational change. The second category is books on the theology of diversity specifically related to the church and power dynamics in diversity. The final category will be important books to consult for a Christian understanding of hospitality.

Christian Leadership, Discipleship, and Congregational Change

In order to effect change on the scale of what is being attempted in this case study, it would serve the practitioner well to be acquainted with leadership in general, and Christian leadership in particular. Any change generally brings about fear of the unknown and mourning of the loss of stability. A leader would do well to be prepared to introduce change at a pace that can be tolerated by those they are leading. This is especially important when navigating the

complex amounts of change that are necessary in dealing with core identity issues, and church cultural issues.

Christian Leadership

Unless Christian ministers lead in a distinctly *Christian* manner, the church may as well be a place of business. Two books which lay a biblical foundation for understanding the theology of Christian leadership will be looked at; *Unleader* and *Strengthening the Soul of your Leadership*. The final book discussed, *Failure of Nerve*, is important to help us maintain health in the relationships of those you are leading.

In *Unleader*, Jane Overstreet focuses on the lives of David and Saul, comparing and contrasting them to declare that “true leadership must be based in the security of God’s love.”¹ Even though both men start with similar calling, anointing, and equipping by God, there is a great difference in their hearts and their relationship with God. Illustrating the key questions from their lives, Overstreet asks how Christian leaders know and respond to God’s love in their own lives. Do I trust God or myself more? Do I build up people or use them up? Do I care more about self-preservation, or a relationship with God? Do I trust God to accomplish what he promises? Do I love people well? While there is nothing revolutionary in Overstreet’s book, her ability and willingness to anchor our understanding of leadership in the biblical narrative is helpful.

1. Jane Overstreet, *Unleader: The Surprising Qualities of a Valuable Leader* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2011), 108.

I disagree with Overstreet's idea that if we're busy and close to burnout it must be because we have taken on things God didn't want us to.² Burnout in ministry is not only, or always because of busyness. Though I do agree with her that burnout can sometimes come from a misplaced sense of responsibility, it does not follow that all cases of busyness come from this. Overstreet has overstated her point in a way that can be read as judgmental. This can heap guilt on some of the more vulnerable among us who are already spinning more plates than they can handle – people juggling work, family, extended family, community, etc.

Ruth Haley Barton, in her book, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, would agree with Overstreet that the most important criterion for leadership is a growing relationship with God.³ She emphasizes this by walking through the life of Moses, showing how he is increasingly anchored in God's presence. Barton argues that our personal transformation, and how it brings us closer to God, is just as important as the work we do for God in ministry. She encourages us to bring all of ourselves to God, stating that if we neglect the care of our own souls, it is likely we will lead the congregations we lead to do the same. When we remain anchored in God, we are able to work from our identity as God's chosen ones, "rather than being subject to other people's expectations and my inner compulsions."⁴ Both Overstreet and Barton agree that when we fail to do the good work of maintaining and growing in our relationship with God, the relationships with those we lead can be unhealthy for both leader and congregation.

2. Overstreet, *Unleader*, 62.

3. Ruth Haley Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 211.

4. Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, 211.

Failure of Nerve, while not distinctly Christian in its exposition, is still formative for an understanding of healthy leadership. Here, Edwin Friedman expands on the importance of healthy relationships, which is touched upon in the books by Barton and Overstreet. Friedman explores the ways in which every system, from families up through governmental levels, is affected by the emotional environment created by the connections between people, each other, and the issues they're facing. The issues he explores are especially important for congregational communities. He states that in America, specifically, we are in a regressive, 'stuck,' state of chronic anxiety, that has caused leaders to 'regress' along with the least functioning among us. In order to move forward, leaders need to pay attention to their own level of functioning, so they can enable the system to progress instead of regress. Friedman encourages leaders to be mostly concerned with their own functioning in relation to the system. Leaders must be aware of and attentive to the emotional fields (triangles) in which they find themselves, and, taking responsibility for their own selves, differentiate themselves while remaining connected.

Friedman's work in healthy relationships in leadership is important for those seeking to lead, but I would not recommend everything he puts forth. My main concern with recommending his work is that he seems to speak as if self-differentiation and emotional triangles explain every potential relational, emotional, and physical issue. Quite frequently he slips into dangerous territory wherein some people might feel that if they only knew the emotional triangle they needed to differentiate themselves from, they could cure their own

depression, or cancer, etc.⁵ He also does not deal adequately with how these things may (or may not) affect folks with neurological diseases (Autism, bipolar, etc.). He sets people up to think they can heal themselves if they are differentiated enough which smacks of the same kind of logic as “faith healing”. You might be able to mitigate some of your responses to issues of mental and physical health, but you cannot control them just by defining yourself more accurately. His ‘cushioning’ of this with the idea that dumb luck plays a part is not a strong enough caution.⁶

All three authors largely come at the same idea from a different angle – the best leaders are healthy leaders who care for their own soul, their own relationships with God, and their part in relationships with others before they care for the arena they’re leading. It is vital for leaders to interact with others from a place of health emotionally, cognitively, and spiritually. Discipleship for leaders must include space for God to unearth the dark places in us and transform them by his light. This leads us directly to our next area of leadership: discipleship.

Discipleship: Identity, Attitude Toward Others

Leaders in a Christian setting are leading not only purpose and direction, but also life change, also known as discipleship. For the purpose of this thesis, the discipleship themes I am most interested in are the concepts of identity/calling, and attitude toward others. To this end,

5. Edwin Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of Quick Fixes* (New York: The Edwin Friedman Trust, 2007). You can see examples of this throughout Friedman’s book, most notably pages 8, 103, 109, 113, 114, plus chapter 2.

6. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 154.

there are three books I would like to offer to aid those wishing to do further work in this area:

Let your Life Speak, *Reconcile*, and *The Gift of Being Yourself*.

In *Let Your Life Speak*, Parker Palmer suggests the burnout many Christian leaders feel is caused by “trying to give what I do not possess,” rather than doing too much.⁷ It stands to reason then, that if leaders have no ‘life with God’ then they have nothing to offer the church. Palmer’s book is all about knowing ourselves as we are intended to be in Christ so that our life and work would flow out of it. Palmer states that if we don’t know ourselves well enough, we can create a ‘false self.’ We use this false self as a mask as we present ourselves to the world and God. At times, we can project this false self on others as well. Largely, these projections are caused by fear or insecurity that dwells deeply within us and goes unacknowledged.⁸ We will encounter many pitfalls if we do not know the lay of the land in our own minds and hearts.⁹

Palmer helps in wrestling with how identity engages our sense of calling. He rightly argues that in order to know what God is inviting us to do, we have to know ourselves as created by God, and God himself as well. If we do not take the time to engage the practices needed to know ourselves and God, we leave space for the false self to determine our actions and reactions.

7. Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 49.

8. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 29. Palmer also connects deep knowledge of self with correct knowledge of others. “If we do not understand that the enemy is within, we will find a thousand ways of making someone ‘out there’ into the enemy, becoming leaders who oppress rather than liberate others” (Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 80.)

9. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 52.

David Benner, in *The Gift of Being Yourself*, also addresses this idea of the false self, agreeing with Palmer that we find our true self only by seeking God.¹⁰ His entire book is a meditation that states one profound truth: you can only come to know yourself through coming to know God. As we come to know God, we know ourselves as deeply loved and deeply broken. Only through learning and embracing this can we give up our 'false self.' Then we can be transformed and live into the self that God has created. "Coming to know and trust God's love is a lifelong process. Making this knowledge the foundation of our identity...will also never happen instantly."¹¹ For Benner, finding our sense of identity is a lifelong process that comes through our increased knowledge of and love for God.

Benner and Palmer's books are helpful in wrestling with discipleship issues of identity and calling, but we will have to go further if we want to think through how to do this work in community. They both write as if identity formation is something that happens between the individual and God. Benner addresses the need to do this work in community only in one paragraph. "No one should ever expect to make the journey alone. And the knowing of self and God...depends on being accompanied by others on our journey into the heart of God."¹² But making that statement alone does not go far enough. If we want to expand his work into the realm of corporate practices for how to discern identity and calling within a community, we will have to be creative on our own, or find others working in this field.

10. David Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call the Self-Discovery* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2015), 94.

11. Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself*, 49.

12. Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself*, 49.

John Paul Lederach's book, *Reconcile*, starts to move in that direction. Lederach's main argument is that reconciliation is not an offshoot of the mission of God, but instead the sum and heart of that mission. He weaves scripture with his own extensive experience to give an insightful and practical book. Lederach states that reconciliation at its heart is about encountering ourselves, and the other, and God's presence in both. As we get to know others, we learn to recognize our differences without allowing those differences to drive us apart from the other, instead we move toward them with the help of God.

When we approach the other as person, the assumptions we bring to the table can affect our view of them. Both Lederach and Palmer talk about the negative biases that get in the way of getting to know the other. Lederach calls it our tendency to create enemies where ones don't exist, while Palmer names it our inclination to assume the worst of the universe.¹³ When we allow our negative biases to drive our relationships the responses available to us are limited by our adrenaline – fight, flight, or freeze. However, when we start instead by recognizing our mutual humanity, other paths to understanding open for us. Lederach says this is a spiritual discipline that is worthy of practice. It is not enough to love the sinner and hate the sin – he raises the stakes saying, “Love the sinner, and see yourself in them. There you will find God.”¹⁴ When we can see ourselves and God in the other, it leaves us open to know them as they are rather than the negative picture we create of them.

13. John Paul Lederach, *Reconcile: Conflict Transformation for Ordinary Christians* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2014), 75; Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 87.

14. Lederach, *Reconcile*, 80.

Congregational Change

The final piece of leadership that is worth discussing within the scope of this project is leading toward congregational change. The books which most directly impacted my understanding in this regard for the sake of this thesis are *Canoeing the Mountains*, *Exiles*, and *The Forgotten Ways*.

Tod Bolsinger's book, *Canoeing the Mountains*, is a necessary read for any minister seeking to serve and lead change in our current cultural context. A central theme to this book is that mission can only happen if the people pursuing it are being transformed, which is in essential agreement with Benner and Barton's theses. However, Bolsinger moves the argument further by stating that this transformation only happens when people are on mission.¹⁵

When it comes to leading congregational change, Bolsinger encourages church leaders to assess context, adjust methods, and adapt the tools of the mission to the situation we find ourselves in. He effectively argues that ministering in the church is entering uncharted territory where technical knowledge is not enough, leaders also need relational trust and adaptive capacity. In order to lead congregational change effectively, the leader needs a clear sense of where the congregation is in terms of its own identity, but also the external context of the environment around them. Using the illustration of Lewis and Clark seeking a water route to the Pacific Ocean, you may have come equipped with canoes and find yourself facing the Rockies. No amount of canoeing knowledge will get you over those mountains. Instead, you find a new way to approach your shared mission. "This is when the transformational leader

15. Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Leading into Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2015), 42.

mobilizes a group toward *the growth they will need* in order to face the disorientation and find the capacity to reframe their *shared* identity in a new expression of their *shared* mission.”¹⁶

Facing a new or unfamiliar circumstance causes the mental maps we brought with us to die, which leads to anxiety, fear, disorientation. The leader’s role in this is to help the congregation enter an adaptive process that will help them creatively face the reality before them while staying true to the mission at hand. “The church at its best has always been...a small band of people willingly heading into uncharted territory with a mission worthy of utmost dedication.”¹⁷

In his book, *Exiles*, Michael Frost is also attempting to answer the question of how we live out the purpose of the church. He says we must gather with others who follow Christ to live an alternative option within a culture that is not conducive to Christianity. According to Frost, this alternative community would be marked by remembrance, promise, critique, and worship. Together we remember the life and work of Christ and use it as our model. Together we promise to be true when others are false, to serve outside ourselves, to live on mission, to live generously, and to live in integrated ways in our homes and work. Together we critique by calling out injustice, protecting and caring for creation, and protecting the unprotected. Together we sing through worshiping God through all of life and love in active ways.

Frost using the metaphor of exile to drive the church’s self-understanding is helpful. But we need to be careful not to think we have simply been exiled from the church as it has been

16. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 90. Emphasis Bolsinger.

17. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 35.

functioning.¹⁸ We are not exiled from poor expressions of church; we are exiled from God's kingdom as it is rightly intended, living in a culture that is not our own. The church, the WHOLE church, should be invited to think, live, act this way. There is no perfect church, we are a messy family of God discerning how to live exiled in a culture that was not designed for the children of God.¹⁹

In *The Forgotten Ways*, Alan Hirsch argues that the adaptive challenges faced by the church today may be able to break open the 'long lost potential' that has been hidden inside the church (the people of God) since the church became 'wedded' to the state under Constantine. He calls this potential 'apostolic genius' which can be unleashed by the Holy Spirit. Hirsch argues that any church that wants to live out God's calling must include this genius, and will be enlivened by the Spirit to launch a self-replicating movement of God.²⁰ Though there is much overlap with Frost, Hirsch finds his own voice to offer something new to the conversation when talking about *communitas*; he brings in ideas from chaos and living systems theory to help us think through how the church functions. This information is new to the discussion and is not addressed by other authors.²¹

18. Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 112, 125, 128.

19. Scot McKnight would have a harsh critique of this concept of 'go make your own church, if yours isn't good enough.' Scot McKnight, *A Fellowship of Differents: Showing the World God's Design for Life Together* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 107.

20. This genius is comprised of six markers: a focus on Jesus as lord, focus on disciple-making, an impulse towards incarnation and mission, influential leadership that empowers others to lead, 'liquid' networks of people instead of institutions, and a focus on an open, changing community that exists 'on the edge of chaos.'

21. Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 229-233.

Hirsch and Frost both suggest in some form that the way forward for the church is a return to a method and manner of being the church based in biblical principles that is willing to adapt to the context around it. This necessarily involves the church itself being willing to change so that it can more adeptly engage the mission of God in the world around it. Here is where they would connect most naturally with the work of Bolsinger. For a church to thrive and engage the mission of God in today's context, it needs to be willing to adjust and adapt to the challenges it faces, rather than continuing to bring old solutions to new problems.

Even when talking primarily about congregational change, the authors seem to agree that at its heart, the mission of the church is about being disciples who are making disciples. Hirsch summarizes this nicely when he says, "Planting a new church or revitalizing an existing one...isn't primarily about buildings [or] worship services...but rather about gearing the whole community around natural discipleship...in the context of everyday life."²² In this way congregational mission and Christian leadership start in the same place, with the need for deep discipleship on all levels of the gathered body of Christ.

Theology of Diversity

Diversity in the Church

One cannot discuss diversity in the church without engaging the book *Divided by Faith* by Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith. Many other works on diversity within the church quote from this seminal work. Emerson and Smith sketch an overview of black-white race relations within the American evangelical context from the 1700s through modern day.

22. Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 185.

Through their historical work, as well as their own research, they show that part of the divide between the black and white Christian communities comes from a difference in the understanding of racism (or what they call ‘race relations’). The white community largely understands the issues to be individualistic, rather than systemic, and injustices to be caused by the motivation of those on the ‘bottom’, rather than unequal access to resources. The black community sees the problems as stemming from systemic issues and inequality. Because of these differences in understanding, the proposed solutions to the problem actually serve to perpetuate the divisions that we find in our society. We end up with congregations that are “internally homogenous, without being comprised of prejudiced people, and even despite the desire of some for mixed-race congregations.”²³

Emerson and Smith do a great job laying a foundation for the conversation of diversity within the church. They do not do much in the way of offering a theology of diversity or solutions for the problems they highlight, but, to their credit, this is self-reportedly not within the scope of their book. Other authors build off their work and fill in some of these blanks.²⁴

In *Disunity in Christ*, Christina Cleveland starts her case by saying Jesus calls us to unity, but we tend towards division as we define for ourselves who we should include in ‘us’ and who should be considered ‘them.’ Mining the field of social psychology, Cleveland brings to light concepts there that can help us in understanding the causes of disunity and how to move

23. Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 136.

24. Emerson himself, along with three authors who are different than himself, took up the theological foundation and practical way forward in their book, *United By Faith*. Although I now believe it is an important work to engage when addressing issues of diversity in the church, I did not discover this book until after the case study, so it was not formative for my understandings of these issues.

toward unity. There are mental energy reasons why it is helpful for us to categorize people as 'us/them', but these categories actually do more harm than good. We tend to treat people in the 'outgroup' worse than those who are in the inside – we are unwilling to learn from them. Groups that see themselves as separate from each other also tend towards conflict (and even violence.)

We can work against this by being aware of the ways we categorize others, by intentionally including 'them' in our definition of 'us,' and by putting ourselves in situations to interact with others personally. In order to do this, we have to be aware of power differentials, those with 'more' social power will have to give us some power to empower others. In addition, leaders will need to model this well for those they're leading. The effort is worth it as it can help us truly to be one in the ways that Jesus invites us to be.

I want to build on a few of Cleveland's ideas, which could use a broadening. First, Cleveland advocates defining our 'in group' as all Christians, whatever theological makeup or stripe. She talks specifically about needing to draw near to the ones who are 'judgmental and anti-intellectual.'²⁵ This can pose a serious logistical problem for living this out as not every group of Christians defines their 'in group' the same. What happens when one 'side' is working to include others, while the other 'side' is working to exclude? Secondly, Cleveland is working her premise specifically in relationship to helping Christians reach better unity with other Christians and does not take her premise to the logical continuation of this. That is, Cleveland does not address how we as Christians perceive and receive those who are NOT Christians. We

25. Christena Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces That Keep Us Apart*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2013), 17.

must be careful, in using her ideas, that Christians would not limit 'in group' to all Christians while continuing to exclude non-Christians.

Sarah Shin also speaks about embracing differences in her book, *Beyond Colorblind*. Shen goes farther in helping us to think theologically and practically about what it would take to be a truly multi-ethnic community. In the first half of the book, using scripture and real-life examples, she walks through the process each person needs to go through for God to redeem their ethnicity. First, you must be willing to acknowledge that God designed your ethnicity for good, but it was damaged by the fall. The brokenness of our world shows up in the ways we relate to our own ethnicity, and the ethnicity of others. Through Jesus' work on the cross, our ethnicities can be redeemed and repurposed as we're sent out to invite others into God's healing relationship.

The second half of the book focuses on some of the practical skills and intentional changes that take a community from 'colored attendance' to truly multi-ethnic. First, you have to build trust across ethnic lines by adopting a learning posture. Some key skills will help you learn to communicate better in a diverse setting as well as handle conflict in a way that deepens community instead of dividing it. Because true multi-ethnic community has been part of God's design from the beginning, we must be about pursuing ethnic justice in our larger communities, as we partner with God and others different than us to create something new in the world.

Shin also deals with some ethnic blind spots that we all encounter. "Curiously, Asian churches, much like Latino or black churches, might affirm their ethnic heritage but do little to challenge the negative parts of their culture. We sometimes passively accept things as they are

because we have a broken understanding of our ethnicities.”²⁶ This same blindness to our own brokenness is true of individuals as they reflect on their own ethnicity, as well as ‘white’ churches. Our broken sense of our own ethnicity leads us not to challenge things within ‘white’ culture, or the sense of ‘white’ culture as ‘normative.’

Shin introduces the idea of intercessional apology, which I find helpful. Intercessional apology is the practice of apologizing on behalf of other Christians whether or not you personally engaged in what you are apologizing for. This concept is important, but I’m left wondering how we go beyond saying ‘I’m sorry my people did this’ to extend the in-group so that ‘they’ become part of ‘my people’?²⁷ Is it enough simply to own the communal sin? Or does the ‘wall’ between ‘us’ and ‘them’ need to come down? I think it would be worth further reflection and work in this arena. How do we own our own ethnic identities in a way that honors the differences among us, while ever expanding the community of who is ‘one of us’? This leads us well into the next section for consideration: how to address power dynamics in diversity within the church.

Power Dynamics in Diversity

Miroslav Volf writes a dense volume on how to relate to others entitled *Exclusion and Embrace*. Volf’s main premise is that the work of Jesus made possible, and modeled for us, a way to embrace the other. This embrace is only made possible through self-giving love. Christ, and his work on the cross, makes it possible to remain our own differentiated selves, while

26. Sarah Shin, *Beyond Colorblind: Redeeming our Ethnic Journey* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 53.

27. Shin, *Beyond Colorblind*, 93-4.

accepting those who are different. Volf is essentially in agreement with Friedman that an individual must be clear about who they are. Only while remaining differentiated can you be in right relationship with others.

Volf goes on to say that we become united in Christ, not as homogeneous beings, but as multicultural beings. Our society tries to convince us that inclusion has won, but history has proven this not to be the case. In fact, most 'inclusion' rides in at the expense of excluding some. In order to enact the embrace of self-giving love that was modeled for us through Christ, we have to ask for forgiveness (recognizing all have sinned – perpetrators and victims alike), make space for others, and allow God to heal our memory. When we embrace, we open our arms, creating space, wait for the other to respond, bring them into ourselves (which changes both sides of the encounter), and release them, hopefully to return again.

Volf has a wonderful chapter on gender identity, but it shows the age of the book that I cannot hear that chapter title without wishing he would include a discussion on LGBT issues. He states that “the problem of gender identity and difference remains a significant one,” however does nothing to address how Christians can think about LGBT from a theological standpoint.²⁸ He is speaking specifically about male vs. female gender identity. It must be stated, Volf is not *intending* to broaden the conversation to LGBT issues. However, given the frequency of the conversation currently in our churches and in our society, it is worth further theological reflection on how the ideas of this chapter would expand in this realm.

28. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 167.

As part of the focus of my thesis is on power and hospitality, it is worth mentioning a critique of Volf's conversation about power and self-giving. He states that in the world we inhabit, "the condition of reciprocity is so rarely fulfilled. Self-giving is not met with self-giving, but with exploitation and brutality.... In a world of violence, the cross, that eminently counter-cultural symbol that lies at the heart of the Christian faith, is a scandal."²⁹ Volf revisits this theme frequently throughout the book, even concluding that both victim and perpetrator must repent. He advocates not returning violence with violence, leaving the final act of peacemaking to the God who seeks to end the cycle of violence. However, he does not address at all what the person with less power (politically, physically, or otherwise) should do when confronted with violence against their persons. Is there a cross-shaped response to that which does not perpetuate the cycle of violence but also does not seem to expect powerless people to give themselves up to their unrepentant, violent perpetrators? More theological work should be done in this arena, as Volf is unfortunately silent.

Shin overlaps directly in conversation with Volf in her chapter on ethnicities restored for better. She even quotes him on page 79: "Forgiveness flounders because I exclude the enemy from the community of humans even as I exclude myself from the community of sinners." Volf and Shin both agree that both sides of the ethnic violence need to repent in order to move forward and break the cycles that threaten to keep them stuck on opposite sides.

In his book, *Trouble I've Seen*, Drew Hart offers a challenging critique of the American society and American church. Hart says that, throughout its history, America has held the

29. Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 26.

wealthy white male experience to be normative, and largely utilized this norm to construct a society that privileges these characteristics while oppressing those who do not 'fit' this mold. He challenges our definition of racism, saying that even it is constructed to preserve this white normative experience. Racism, he says, is not an individual prejudice or individual action, it is a socialized structure of hierarchy that organizes our culture to preserve/privilege one group of people while keeping other groups from accessing these same benefits. Here he is in agreement with the thesis of Emerson's book, though he is writing from a distinctly black perspective, which is a departure from *Divided by Faith*. Where Emerson and Smith use statistics to make their case, Hart has lived the division of which they speak.

Hart walks through American history to illustrate how our country has functioned this way systematically in the lives of Black Americans, from the start of our country through today. Throughout the book he shows how the Jesus we see in scripture was not born to a normatively privileged place in his society, but he enters at the bottom of the bottom. Throughout Jesus' ministry, he is intentional about subverting the social hierarchies of his day to call them to follow his cross-shaped kingdom. Hart's overarching argument is that we must learn to recognize the hierarchies that rule our social order (racism, sexism, and classism alike) so that we can follow Jesus in subverting them. In God's kingdom, only Jesus is Lord. We must allow him to be Lord, while everyone else shares an equal seat at the table and together live a Jesus-shaped way of being community in the world.

Hart's definition of racism is extremely helpful: "Racism is 'a racialized systemic and structural system that organizes our society.' Racism structures society in such a way that the white dominant group systemically advantages and over values its own group members while

oppressing and exploiting other people.”³⁰ I have tried in reflecting on his work to call it ‘systemic racism’ in an effort to distinguish it from individual racism, but in Hart’s view, that is my white privilege/assumptions showing. Hart would say Racism is *always* operating systemically. We use our ‘individual racism’ definition and ‘overt racism’ examples to scapegoat a few so the majority of us can feel free from guilt.

Hart and Shin would have some great talks around ethnicity and race when it comes to whiteness. I think they largely agree with the ways in which ‘whiteness’ has been used in a fallen world. But Hart stops short of offering a way forward, as Shin does, into understanding white ethnicity and redeeming it for good. They would both agree that repenting of and leaving behind the domination and ‘over-advantages’ is a good step one – but on its own, it will not be enough.³¹ We must follow the path Jesus offers as a way forward. Here Volf would come back into the conversation to say that Jesus’ path is one of giving himself up for the sake of others. In the context of the way power is used explicitly and implicitly between diverse groups within the church, we need to follow Christ’s example to give our power away so that others have room to join us at the table.

Hospitality in the Church

One helpful way to consider the Church’s engagement in the world, and issues of diversity within the church, is through looking at hospitality and power. In chapter two, we looked at the biblical foundation for the church being willing not only to be a hospitable

30. Drew Hart, *Trouble I’ve Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2016), 51.

31. Hart, *Trouble I’ve Seen*, 103,116.

presence in the world but also to give up their own power so others can host them. The first two books I will look at here, *New Testament Hospitality* and *Making Room*, help us think through a biblical understanding of the concept of hospitality. The final book, *To Change the World*, while not talking about hospitality in particular still engages related ideas. In particular, this book encourages the church to consider engaging and changing the world through creating hospitable places within it.

In his brief survey, *New Testament Hospitality*, John Koenig illuminates for us the understanding of hospitality that comes through the life of Jesus and the writings of Paul and Luke. He does not set out to cover all the New Testament has to offer on the subject, but instead to give a highlight reel that serves as a jumping point for reflections on the way our understanding of hospitality can serve the world around us even today. Jesus builds off the tradition of hospitality laid out in the Old Testament to bring together people different from one another at his table. Jesus serves us at his table of fellowship and sends us to serve others.³² We also see in the life of Jesus the importance of partnering with strangers as it's "precisely in the midst of a partnership with strangers the power of the kingdom becomes most evident."³³ After setting out these basic themes in the life of Jesus, Koenig traces them through the writings of Paul and Luke.

Koenig's thesis could best be summarized by a quote from his final chapter. "New Testament hospitality centers upon meetings and transactions with strangers that are

32. John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1985), 41.

33. Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 36.

characterized by the shifting of guest and host roles, and even (it is claimed) by acts of God.”³⁴

Throughout the other chapters, Koenig illustrates how the roles between guest and host are shown as fluid throughout the writings he highlights. The person who ‘should’ be the host, becomes the guest, and the roles are more fluid than we would expect. Additionally, hospitality in the New Testament often takes place at a table similar to the one Jesus set for us. In his final chapter, Koenig builds off these concepts to help us start to think about how we can engage these ideas today. He suggests that we can open our eyes to the partnership with strangers that can take place in everyday encounters.

One cannot address a Christian understanding of hospitality without an understanding of Christine Pohl’s book, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*.³⁵ She begins her book by pointing out how the definition of hospitality has changed over time. Where once it would have meant almost exclusively the act of hosting people you may not have known before, hospitality today generally means allowing friends or family to come for a meal or a stay. Pohl states in her introduction that “the term ‘hospitality’ has lost its moral dimension, and, in the process, most Christians have lost touch with the amazingly rich and complex tradition.”³⁶

In her first section, Pohl briefly surveys a history of hospitality through scripture and history. Here she has a lot of overlap with Koenig, even citing him in some sections. However, Pohl comes to add her own distinct voice to the conversation when she moves on to sections

34. Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 124.

35. Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B Eerdmans, 1999).

36. Pohl, *Making Room*, 4.

two and three. There she helps us think through what the practice of hospitality offers, and how we can reengage it for our day. Pohl talks about how hospitality offers dignity through recognition of the humanity of the ones we host. She speaks of the types of people we might be invited to host.

One of her more illuminating chapters is on how Christian hospitality is by its nature a hospitality offered from the margin. Here she is able to explore the ways in which hospitality and power are related. If those who are poor are always the 'guests' and never the 'hosts', the result is a disempowerment that communicates they are inherently less valuable and have less to offer. "The role of host is empowering because it is an acknowledgement that one has rightful access to a place of meaning and value, and that one has the authority to welcome other persons into it."³⁷ This is why I think it is especially important for the church to be able to follow Jesus' example in receiving the hospitality of those to which we are sent to minister. Pohl's work here is helpful but could be taken further. She states, "Many of us are situated so centrally that we have to make conscious decisions to experience marginality in our lives."³⁸ But the examples she gives of people who do this are extreme ones (e.g. voluntary homelessness). Following the example of Jesus, rather than forcing ourselves into places of marginality, it may be better to start by allowing those who are already marginalized to become hosts for us.

Pohl ends her book with three chapters that help us consider the practical aspects of the spiritual practice of hospitality. She helps us consider the issues around how sin can influence and affect our hospitality, requiring us to have appropriate limits and boundaries. She also

37. Pohl, *Making Room*, 121.

38. Pohl, *Making Room*, 123.

helps us consider how to make every space in our lives a hospitable environment before turning to the ways in which it draws us closer to God. “Because of God’s presence in the practice, when we offer hospitality our relationship with God is deepened. Hospitality helps us to grow because God is already working in the lives of the people who come and in the lives of those who welcome them.”³⁹

In his book, *To Change the World*, James Davison Hunter states that Christians have, from their beginning, sought to keep the mandate of creation to cultivate and keep the garden, and as such they seek to engage the world. This creation mandate has found itself being ‘fulfilled’ in various ways and forms throughout history. Currently, we operate under the assumption that culture changes first in the ‘hearts and minds’ of those engaged in the culture. Because of this, we tend to vie for political power, thinking that if we change the structures, the minds and hearts will follow. Hunter effectively argues that this is not how cultures change.⁴⁰ Instead, he states that cultures change by networks of elites, in places off the center of power, leveraging their influence and resources to move the center. Currently, Christians are not pursuing the positions that would give them this kind of influence, nor are they networking or leveraging effectively.

He goes on to argue that our dominant ways of engaging the current culture are through ‘defense against’, ‘relevant to’, or ‘purity from’ the surrounding culture. I see these stances playing out in arenas outside the church as well, specifically in the political groups of (in

39. Pohl, *Making Room*, 186.

40. James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). For more on this, see chapter 4 where Hunter walks through his understanding of culture and how it changes.

order) republican, democrat, and libertarian. However, his sketches of these three paradigms are simplistic. Some people, and denominations, blend two, or even three, paradigms together. He also seems to imply that all 'relevance' leads to universalism, when there are some denominations choosing this mode without going to this extreme. Hunter says the three frameworks assume that the 'problems' Christians need to fix are secularization, exploitation, or abuse of power. Hunter argues that the larger issues are increased pluralism (difference) and increased relativism (dissolution). To combat these issues, Hunter suggests that Christians take a stance of 'faithful presence within.' This would mean we model ourselves after Jesus to pursue others, identify with them, and offer a life of flourishing through sacrificial love. Here is where I believe Hunter's conversation is most helpful in the context of hospitality. In essence, the heart of his argument is that we should not attempt to 'change the world', but to allow God to change us into people who can create hospitable spaces for others within whatever context we find ourselves.

Frost and Hunter would find themselves in lengthy conversations around the level to which we should be engaged politically. Frost embraces political engagement to the degree that he suggests engaging with a movement (New Realism) that is interested in 'making America more spiritual.'⁴¹ When talking about tackling big political issues, specifically dealing with big business, Frost talks as if politics can save and/or change the values of individuals, while Hunter effectively argues it cannot.⁴² However, Hunter is not always clear what our interaction with politics *should* become, or could be; and complete disengagement is not possible. Frost also

41. Frost, *Exiles*, 90, 100.

42. Frost, *Exiles*, 200. Hunter, *To Save the World*, 171.

seems to think more highly of the political advocacy power of the evangelical Christian community in America, while Hunter doesn't seem to think it has as much power as Frost suggests.⁴³

One interesting area of conversation that Hirsch and Hunter could have is the relationship between cultural change and elitism. Hunter says change happens through elites who are off center in seats of power, leveraging their resources and networks of people.⁴⁴ While both say movements are started off-center, Hirsch says that new missional movements are often started by non-elites who are *not* in seats of power, and that the resulting movements often excite those in powerful positions toward change.⁴⁵ I wonder how much of this is the two speaking past each other, coming from differing understandings of cultural change, and how much is true disagreement. They do have some overlap, though, in that the missional movements Hirsch is describing are small, localized, contextualized gathering around Jesus and his mission, which is similar to how Hunter might describe the form/function of a church seeking to be a faithful presence.

Conclusion

The theological work, emotional work, and practical work of this thesis-project was shaped deeply by a plethora of voices and influences. Though not an exhaustive list, I have sought to include here the major shapers of my thought and project. I am deeply grateful for

43. Frost, *Exiles*, 265-6.

44. Hunter, *To Save the World*, 42-43.

45. Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 194.

the work these theologians have done to pave the way in the topics of Christian leadership, the theology of diversity, and a Christian understanding of hospitality. For those wanting to explore these concepts in their own congregational settings, these books are a great place to start.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Now that we have laid out the problem in its setting, the biblical and theological foundation, as well as reviewed sources that are important in these topics, we can turn to the heart of the project. To revisit the thesis statement briefly, a church can only make the transition to a more diverse congregational culture and leadership by prayerfully addressing issues of identity, power, and calling. I will outline the project design before providing a snapshot of where the congregation started in March 2019. Next, I will summarize the implementation of the project, walking through each aspect and sharing the results. I will end this chapter with an updated snapshot from December 2019.

Project Design

A project of this type in a church our size does not lend itself to a scientific experiment, as there is no way to create a control group. I instead engaged a case study. According to *lexico.com*, a case study is “a process or record of research into the development of a particular person, group, or situation over a period of time.”¹ This method of research is appropriate to explore a transition of this nature for a number of reasons. First, in moving a semi-diverse church into a more robust expression of the diversity God desires, we are making a transition that is not common or widely researched. Because the scope of the problem and the options for solution are not known beforehand it would not be possible to propose an experiment, or

1. “Case Study,” *Lexico*, accessed February 11, 2020, https://www.lexico.com/definition/case_study.

even quasi-experiment, at this stage. Second, because a transition of this nature is by design deeply contextual, the goal of this research is not to create something here in Lynn that can be easily implemented in other locations. Instead, the hope is that the process we entered could illuminate some of the complex questions and possibilities that other churches might face in making a similar transition. A case study will be more easily seen as illustrative of the complexities of this transition, rather than normative as a path for others.

While the project design is a case study, my role as investigator was not limited only to that of observer. Instead, I wanted to lead our congregation into situations and contexts where they could wrestle with their understanding of their own identity, their willingness to relate to others who are different, and their sense of calling to do so. My intention was to engage this at an individual and a communal level.

To that end, I helped my congregation wrestle with these complex issues through three key components. First, I preached three sermon series, one in the spring, one in the early summer, and one in the fall of 2019. Second, I hosted two conversation groups focused on exploring our sense of vision, as well as issues of identity and difference. I had intended to host more of these conversations but was unable to as we were given an opportunity to work with an outside organization starting in September 2019. The conversations they hosted were similar enough that we discontinued the vision and prayer conversations. Third, I crafted a self-assessment survey for the whole church to take and sent an email interview to six individuals. I will use the results from both of these to illustrate the change and growth from the beginning of the project until the end. I attempted a fourth part of the project, where our church in response to what we were learning would give and receive hospitality with another cultural

group. However, this did not work out the way I anticipated, and I will reflect on what was learned through this failure.

Snapshot of Where We Started: March 2019

When I laid out the setting, I gave a very brief snapshot of the congregational setting. I would like to elaborate on that here as a way of illustrating where we started. I will start with some basic demographics and then share narratively my assessment of their openness to change.

At Lynn Nazarene, we have 46 people deeply connected to the church, meaning they consider this church ‘my church’ and attend here more than another congregation. If everyone were gathered in the same room at the same time with no guests, we would have 46 people present. Five of that 46 are homebound and do not ever attend. The average weekly worship attendance for the past nine months is 30, with a high monthly average of 37 (April) and a low monthly average of 21 (July). In the month of November and December, we had four families as guests, for a total of 10 guests in that time period.

Within our 46 deeply connected folks, 34 are adults, two are teens, and nine are children. Our youngest child just turned two, and our oldest adult just turned 39. The adult population has six people between the ages of 20-35, eighteen people between 35-70, and eleven over the age of 70. Eighteen of the adults are college graduates, one of whom has an earned doctorate. Nine of the adults are in school at the moment, pursuing a degree of higher education. Of the connected people, 41 speak English as their first language, 5 are bi-lingual.²

2. Four bi-lingual Spanish/English, one bi-lingual Haitian/English.

As far as ethnicity, 28 out of 46 are white, 14 black, 4 Latino. In addition to those born in America, we have people connected who were born in at least three other countries – most numerous from Barbados and Haiti.

According to *United by Faith*, the definition of a multi-racial congregation is one “in which *no one racial group accounts for 80 percent or more of the membership.*”³ According to this definition, Lynn Nazarene can already be considered a multi-racial church, as our percentages break down roughly to 60% white, 30% black, and 10% Hispanic. One might wonder, then, why the case study would focus on increasing the diversity of an already diverse congregation. The reason for this is two-fold. First, though our church community is deeply diverse, it does not yet reflect the level of diversity in the community surrounding it, where the numbers would be closer to 30% Hispanic and have an additional 10% of other ethnicities. The second reason is that though we are ethnically diverse in our attendance, we are not diverse in our leadership or church culture. Lynn Nazarene has been shaped predominantly by white culture, which is evident in its leadership and even in its song selection. As the city population around the church transitioned to more diversity, the church culture did not keep pace.

I have been serving at Lynn Nazarene since August of 2018. During that time, I have been assessing the community as well as the congregation to get a sense for where we stand and where God might be inviting us to go. When I arrived, the board was asking me to help the church find a new vision and sense of direction. In a board meeting in February 2019, when I presented the church life cycles, the three-person board all agreed that the church was in

3. Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey, and Karen Chai Kim, *United by Faith: The Multicultural Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3. Emphasis DeYoung and Emerson.

decline/death and had been for at least 20-25 years. Since I've arrived, I've seen a desire within the congregation to see new life, new vitality, and new people come to this historic church, but there has not been a clear sense of HOW we should go about doing this. When I arrived, the conversation in the church, at least at the board level, was around wanting the church to grow, wanting the church to thrive, but not knowing what we needed to do to get there. Multiple people mentioned that too few people did all the work, and the 'work' that was being done was not resulting in the effects they wanted to see. The church, in general, was hoping for a change, but did not know what it should be.

As I got to know the community, one of the things that struck me most deeply, as mentioned in the introduction, was that the community around our church is predominantly Spanish-speaking, and our congregation is predominantly English-speaking. It seemed clear to me that in order to reach our community, we needed to deal with this 'elephant in the room.' There was a Spanish-speaking Nazarene congregation meeting in our church building for quite a few years before my arrival. The relationship between the two congregations was not operating very smoothly, and I had hoped to work with the other pastor to figure out a way for increasing partnership. In November of 2018, that pastor felt called to leave, and even though they had an interim pastor in place, the Sunday after he left the church of approximately 50 was running three people. The second Sunday after, only two showed up.

As I prayerfully considered what our role and response in this should be, I felt God inviting us to consider replanting as a bi-lingual congregation. A former pastor of the Lynn church, now retired, attends again. As I shared with the church this seed of what I thought God might be inviting us to, he shared with me part of his reason for leaving Lynn back in the early

1990s. He said at that time he felt God was inviting the church to engage the Spanish-speaking community in Lynn, and he didn't feel he had the skills to do so. He left partly to create space for God to make that change. However, in the time since he left, the church has not made a move in that direction.

The other piece that is worth mentioning as a starting place is the church, in general, did not see itself as a re-start or church plant. Even the people committed to the church saw our gathering as an established church and we functioned as a dying church. In this mode or mindset, the 'goal' is to get more people to come so we can 'continue to exist.' Within the larger gathered congregation there was not a clear vision of who we are, what we're about, or where we're going as a church. Historically, the church has always desired to care for the community, and there was a sense of loss that we were not engaged in that in the moment. Though the last time they deeply engaged in supporting the community, the ministry ended in church-wide burnout. They had been essentially supporting a program that was too big for the number of people who had the energy to run it. Helping the church understand itself in a different way – as a plant instead of an established church – is part of the movement that I was hoping to see over the course of the case study.

Project Implementation

Sermon Series

In March of 2019 I began the first of three sermon series designed to help engage the congregation in wrestling with their sense of identity, sense of calling, and engagement with 'the other.' I have included an outline of the sermon series in Appendix A. Because of the size of

the church and the schedules of those most invested, I considered Sunday mornings the best time to have a ‘family gathering’ where we could engage these topics frankly. We would occasionally have a guest attending the service, but most Sundays were attended largely by those already committed to the church who considered it their home church.

The first sermon series was entitled “Accidental Missionaries” and went for eight weeks during Lent and Easter. The series started with the concept that everyone who follows God is sent as a missionary into the world, whether you thought you were or not. Over the course of eight weeks, we looked at scriptures that helped us wrestle with the internal and external barriers we feel in response to this calling. We looked at barriers such as, lack of time, lack of training, lack of resources, and low self-worth. We talked about communal expectations around the calling to missions, our individual and communal fears, as well as what it might look like to be a community on mission.

The focus of this series was formational as well as informational. Each week I ended the sermons with questions designed to challenge and engage the congregation with these barriers, asking for a written, verbal, or corporate response. For example, the week we talked about how our expectations don’t always line up with God’s fell on Palm Sunday. At the end of the service, I asked people to think about the expectations they had for what God was going to do in our church. As we prayed in response, I asked any who wanted to give those expectations to God to come forward and place their palm branches, that we had handed out earlier in the service, on the altar. I have kept the branches in my office to help me remember that God determines our outcomes, not my expectations. This series ended just before our annual meeting, which I was able to use as an opportunity to move the vision conversation I had been

having with the board into the church as the whole. I will share more about this in the next section.

The second sermon series began in early summer and was entitled “Approaching Differences: Engaging ‘The Other’.” This series explored God’s heart for diversity as well as teaching tools for self-reflection and relational engagement. This sermon series was based largely on my year one project, the small group I designed called “Navigating Differences in Everyday Life.” For five weeks, we turned the Sunday morning service into a discipleship workshop where we engaged scripture, learned tools, and practiced them together. Over the course of the series, we engaged the scripture around topics such as God’s heart for difference, our true self vs. false self, seeing others as God sees them, acting neighborly, and handling conflict in the church.

The focus of this second series was experiential as well as formational in nature. The time normally reserved for sermons was instead used as space to interact with scripture as a community and engage in experiential learning. Each week I sent home at least one tool that could be used in multiple settings. Some of the tools offered were cultural dexterity scales, conflict resolution skills, an approaching differences diagram, and the cultural iceberg. At the completion of this sermon series, we held our first of two vision gatherings for any who wanted to attend. I will elaborate on this in the next section.

The final sermon series started in September 2019 with the start of a new school year. It was entitled, “Power and Hospitality in the Kingdom of God,” and lasted seven weeks. Looking first at Jesus as a model for the right use of power, we explored what it means to create hospitable spaces for others. Jesus gave his power away to create space for others. He also

comes primarily as our guest and sends us as guests into the world. Among the themes explored were the extravagance of kingdom hospitality, the way kingdom power is multiplied when we give it away, how we only serve others because we know ourselves as deeply loved, and the invitation to go vulnerably into the world as guests in the comfort zones of others.

The focus of this third series was primarily formational and informational and followed a traditional sermon pattern. The engagement invited at the end of each sermon was reflective and prayerful and included a challenge to find spaces to be guests in the world. My intention had been to end this sermon series with the church choosing to give and receive hospitality in a way that diminished the power differential that can exist in those settings. Rather than we who 'have something to give' giving to they 'who need what we have,' we would receive and give. We invited friends and our neighborhood to come to a Spanish-English conversation class, where English speakers learning Spanish could practice with Spanish speakers learning English.

The conversation classes came and went without an 'other' to give and receive from. In reflection, this kind of give and take can only happen within developing relationships, and through a partnership. In the context of our church, we did not yet have the relationships established with people 'other' than us in order for this to be a 'give and take.' As we went through the sermon series, learning from God about his hospitality, it became clearer that this type of exchange will likely not happen on our turf at all. Instead, Jesus is inviting us to give up our need to determine the context of the exchange, and instead go into hospitable places within our community that may not be in our comfort zone.

Board and Vision Conversations

While the sermon series took place in the larger church setting, I was hosting conversations in smaller settings to allow us to wrestle with what God's invitation for us might be. This took place in three settings: board meetings, vision conversations, and with Vision Partners.

In the March board meeting, I brought before the board the Life Cycle of a Church.⁴ I allowed space for them to assess where the church was at in relationship with this cycle. They did this individually, then we shared as a group. All three of the current board members stated that the church was in old age or death. There were a few interesting things about their observations. First, they said the church had largely been at this stage for 20-25 years. Generally, churches do not stay at this stage for that length of time. I attribute this to the tenacity of the church members, the grace of God, and the unusual presentation of this life stage for this particular congregation.

Most churches, by the time they reach old age and death, have lost their vision and relationship while maintaining their ministries and structures. The Lynn church has an atypical experience. While they *had* lost their vision in old age, they had also given up most ministries and structures. When I arrived, they had one or two weekly Bible studies that were lay led and Sunday morning service. Unlike most churches in a similar situation, the Lynn church had given up all structure and ministries while managing to keep their relationships with each other and God. Because of this, they have been able to maintain a status quo without a sense of vision or renewal for longer than is normal.

4. See figure 2, page 18.

Following the sermon series on Accidental Missionaries, I brought this concept to the larger church during our annual meeting in May. I showed them the church life cycles, explained the board's self-assessment, and told them that, without changing, the church would not survive. However, that is not the end of the story, because we have a choice. As a community we can choose. Do we want to turn to hospice care and lovingly support our gathered community as God sees fit to allow its time to cycle out? Or, alternatively, we could turn to midwifery and allow God to birth something new in and through us within this local context. I urged the church, instead of seeing ourselves as an established church, to start seeing ourselves as a church plant.

At the board meeting following the annual meeting, I started pushing the board even further. It was here I first shared my heart that I felt God was inviting us to become a fully bi-lingual church within the next five years. I told them that part of the way forward would be my willingness to share leadership with a bi-lingual pastor. This conversation set the stage for the fall sermon series when we talked about God's invitation for how we use our power as individuals and a community, giving it away to make space for others.

In the summer, we held two vision and prayer gatherings to allow deeper conversational engagement. At the meeting in July, we had 13 out of our 34 adults in attendance. Over lunch we started by sharing what we loved about our community. That question alone was a stretch for some who, while living in Lynn their whole lives, did not see the community in a positive

light. After that, I shared some community statistics with the group, noting how the language make up in Lynn shifts dramatically as the population gets younger.⁵

In figure 3 below, according to World Population Review, 33.8% of the population of Lynn speaks Spanish as their primary language. This is not surprising given that the 2010 census showed 32% of the population of Lynn being Latino. However, when you break the language down further by ages, something surprising happens. figure 4 shows that for those living in Lynn over the age of 65, only 16.8% speak primarily Spanish. But in figure 5, those between 5-17, the number jumps to 44.6%. For school age kids living in Lynn, Spanish is the dominant language group.

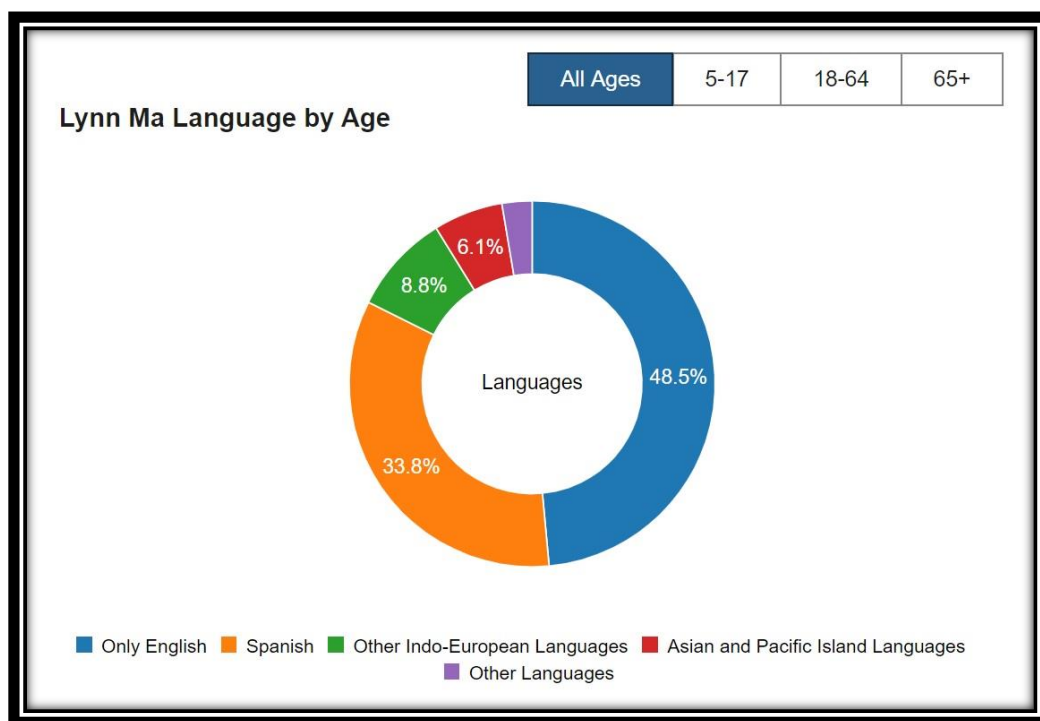


Figure 3. Lynn Languages – All Ages.

5. "Lynn, Massachusetts Population 2019," World Population Review, accessed February 11, 2020, <http://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/lynn-ma-population>.

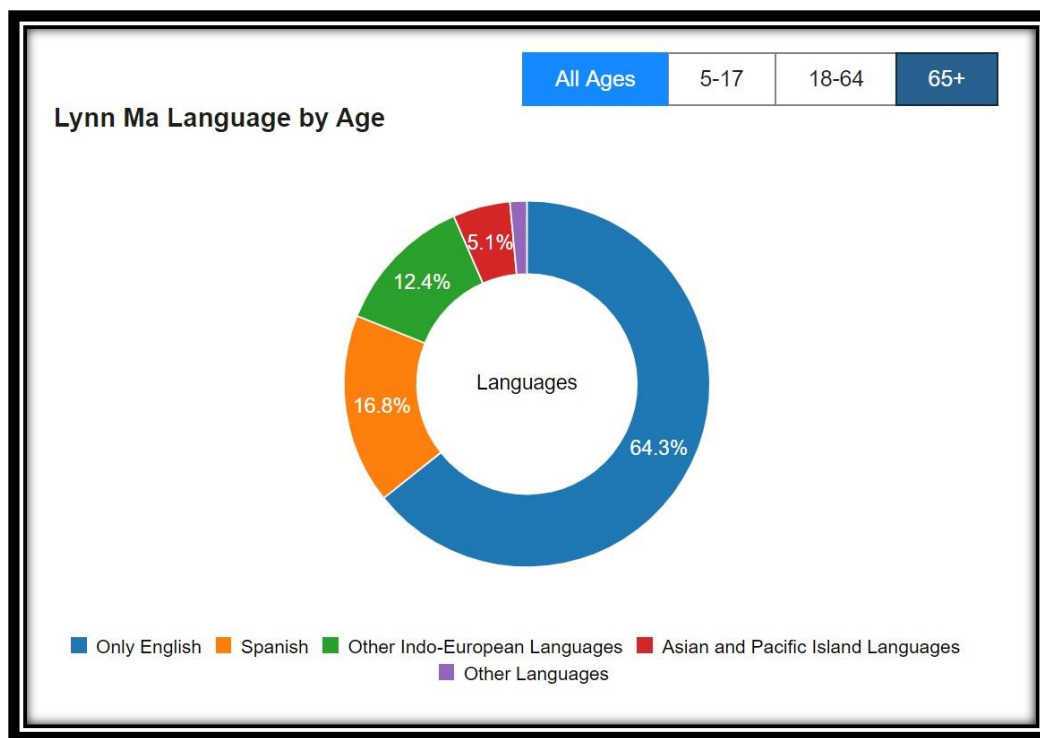


Figure 4. Lynn Languages 65+.

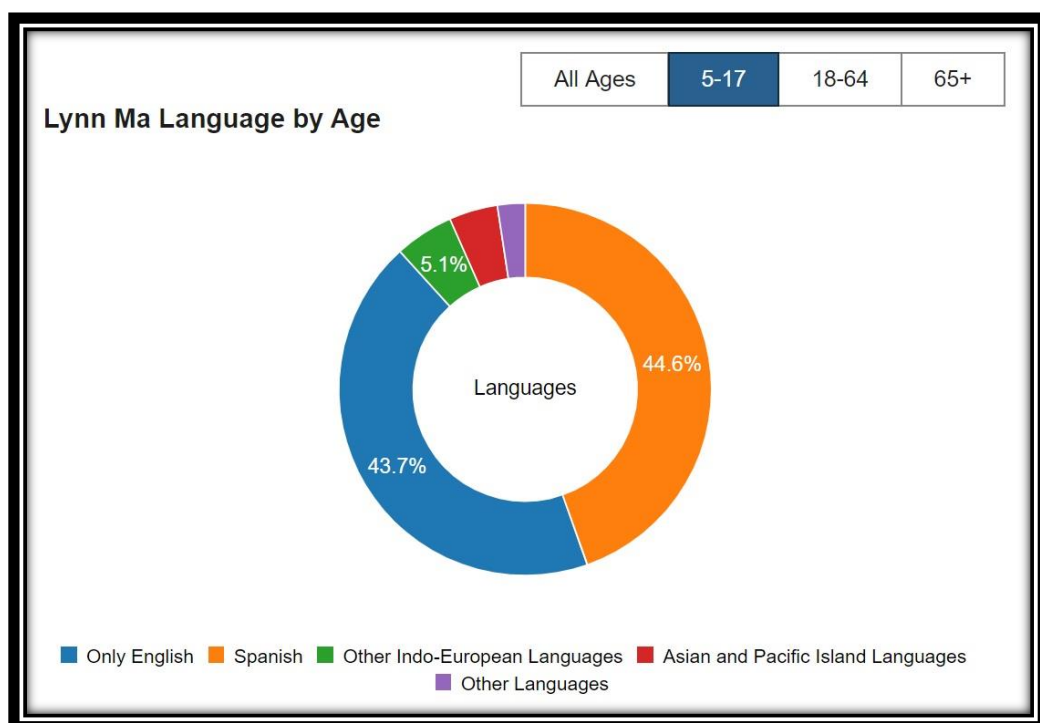


Figure 5. Lynn Languages 5-17.

As part of our vision conversation, I asked for reflections on what our response should be to the shift in primary language based on age demographics. The majority of the folks involved in the conversation were surprised by the numbers. Allowing space to confront this in community, and wrestle with our calling to engage the community, some even were willing to express their uncertainty about how to do this. Some shared about their fear about what things might need to change. It was clear the conversation generated some discomfort for many, and extreme discomfort for a few. We had an adaptive challenge moment, when one individual's reaction to a statement did not line up with the content of the statement. It was clear to me that there was more going on than what was on the surface, and I had to do some very public conflict resolution. It was ironic, as we had just talked in church that morning about conflict resolution within the church. However, we were able to help guide the conversation back to the topic at hand and create space for the individual to be reconciled. We closed with a time praying together that God would increase our creativity and courage.

At our vision and prayer meeting in August, the topic of conversation was diverse worship. We had ten out of our 34 adults attend. We watched a series of videos put out by InterVarsity's 2100 studios that compares diverse worship to home cooking.⁶ Since the Bible invites us to "taste and see that the Lord is good," they run with the illustration of worship being a rich feast.⁷ Each person has types and styles of worship that feel most familiar to them. The videos call this your "worship home cooking." While the videos focus primarily on musical worship, we used them to jump off into a conversation about the entire worship experience.

6. "Diverse Worship Matters Video Series," InterVarsity Twentyonehundred Productions, accessed February 11, 2020, <https://2100.intervarsity.org/overview/diverse-worship-matters-video-series>.

7. Psalm 34:8.

The series encourages you to get to know your own home cooking, learn about the home cooking of others, and ultimately learn to cook their food as well – as a way of encouraging congregations to become more diverse in the worship styles they offer. I took the conversation one step further and asked the people at our gathering what it would take for our church to ‘share the kitchen’ and allow other cooks to prepare the meal. After a generative conversation, we closed with a time of prayer.

I had intended to continue these monthly conversations into the fall, however, an opportunity to engage with an outside organization presented itself. The church board agreed that God seemed to be opening this opportunity up for our community. Vision Partners is a non-profit that seeks to partner with small churches to help them discover God’s invitation for their local context.⁸ Utilizing the Church Unique process, Vision Partners come alongside churches to help focus in their identity, mission, vision, and goals.⁹ They approached our church in the summer to ask if we would participate in their next cohort beginning in September 2019. As the gatherings mirrored some of what I was planning to cover in our monthly vision and prayer meetings, we suspended those once the board approved our partnership with Vision Partners.

The board invited 11 individuals to be a part of this team who were either leading or had the potential to lead within the church. Though this was a different direction than I anticipated at the start of the case study, I believe these Vision Partner meetings were helpful in putting some focus to the work God is doing within our church. In September, we wrestled

8. For more information about Vision Partners, see <https://framingthefuture.church/>.

9. For more information about Church Unique, see <https://www.churchunique.com/>.

with the barriers that keep us from engaging God's next step for us. In October, we searched for our kingdom concept. November's meeting had us wrestling through crafting a mission statement. Finally, in December we explored the values that undergird our ministry. This partnership with Vision Partners will continue through May of 2020. An outline of the results of these conversations can be found in Appendix B.

Survey and Interviews

In December 2019, at the end of the case study, I designed a church-wide survey and an email interview to help assess the growth and change during the case study period. The survey was intended to be a self-assessment of an individual's perceived growth and change over the case study period, as well as their assessment of the church's growth in the same time frame. The email interview was focused exclusively on that person's perception of the church's change and growth. A copy of the survey and interview questions as well as survey results can be found in Appendices C and D.

On December 15, 2019, I offered the survey to any who wanted to take it after service. My pastoral intern took it upon himself personally to invite people to fill out the survey as they were leaving. Thirty people were in attendance that Sunday morning, of which eight were children. Of the 21 adults (not including myself), 10 completed the survey. An additional two opted to take the survey home but never returned it to me. The survey asked 10 rated questions, five each on their personal growth during the case study period (figure 6), and the church's growth during the same period (figure 7). Additionally, I included three open-ended questions (figure 8).

Reflecting on your **PERSONAL** growth and discipleship over the past 6 months, please answer the following:
Mark an X in the box that best reflects your answer. One per row.

| | 1 Strongly Disagree | 2 | 3 Neither agree nor disagree | 4 | 5 Strongly Agree |
|--|---------------------------|---|------------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| SAMPLE RESPONSE EXAMPLE | | | X | | |
| I grew in my love for Jesus | | | | | |
| I grew in my desire to befriend people different than me | | | | | |
| I grew in my <u>understanding</u> of God's mission in the world | | | | | |
| I grew in my <u>desire to be engaged</u> in God's mission in the world | | | | | |
| I am praying more now than I was 6 months ago | | | | | |

Figure 6. Personal Growth Questions.

The personal result question with the relatively highest result was - "I grew in my desire to befriend people different than me," with an average result of 4.2. However, as three of the remaining four questions all had an average result of 4.1, this relative strength does not show much significance over other questions. The personal result question with the lowest result was - "I am praying more now than I was 6 months ago," with a result of 3.1. This result is noteworthy, as it is a full point lower than any of the other results in the personal growth questions. This suggests to me that growth in prayer is a self-identified relative weakness in the spiritual growth of my congregation. As our connection to God is vital for any growth we would hope to see both personally and corporately, this stands out to me as an area to engage in the coming months within our congregation. It leaves me with questions - what would 'growth' in prayer look like or feel like to this congregation? How can I as pastor lead toward this kind of growth?

Reflecting on **OUR CHURCH'S** growth over the past 6 months, please answer the following:

| | 1 Strongly Disagree | 2 | 3 Neither agree nor disagree | 4 | 5 Strongly Agree |
|--|---------------------------|---|------------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| We grew in our love for Jesus | | | | | |
| We grew in our understanding of God's mission in the world | | | | | |
| We grew in <u>our desire to engage</u> our community with God's mission | | | | | |
| We are <u>more willing</u> to share leadership with people who are different than us | | | | | |
| We are praying more now than we were 6 months ago | | | | | |

Figure 7. Church Growth Questions.

All five questions in the church growth section had an average result of either 3.8 or 3.6 which indicates that the perception of the congregation is that growth (or lack of growth) in all five of these areas is about equal. It was interesting to note that they scored the church's growth as slightly lower than personal growth (where all but one result was in the 4.0-4.2 range). There are many reasons why this could be, ranging from inflated sense of self-growth to a willingness to be more 'realistic' with church results to not knowing how to assess the growth of a group of people accurately. Regardless of the reason, overall the results of this survey suggest that those respondents who participated felt that they as individuals grew slightly more in these areas during the case study period than the church as a whole did.

Three open-ended questions helped to encourage the congregation to reflect on the current state of the congregation and its potential growing edges. For the question on what they were learning about discipleship there were nine responses. Three of the nine talked about the need to increase their trust and dependence on God as the growing edge of their own discipleship. Two of the nine spoke of the need to 'just do it,' to dive into whatever God would ask of them. For the question on what God has been teaching about how to engage

those who are different there were also nine responses. Two of the nine spoke about how they are learning to listen to those who are different. Two of the nine talked about their growth in love for others. Finally, three of the nine spoke about the need to make it a priority, while two of those mentioned that it would be challenging.

| |
|---|
| 1: What is 1 thing God has been teaching you over the past 3 months about being his disciple? _____ |
| 2: What is 1 thing God has been teaching you over the past 3 months about engaging people who are different than you? _____ |
| 3: Name up to 3 changes you think we need to make in our church so we can better engage our diverse city? _____ |
| 4: Looking at your three suggested changes – Circle the change which is most important (in your opinion). |

Figure 8. Open-ended Reflection Questions.

If I were to repeat a survey of this nature, I would offer the survey for two weeks, or over the course of a month, though in the current state of the church, I would not be likely to get many more adult respondents. As it is, fully one third of our adult population took the survey. As an additional one third are either homebound or towards end of life, I consider the results of this survey to be a fair representation of the congregation as a whole.

In addition to the survey, I invited six individuals to fill out an interview email, using a cross section of older and younger, newer and long-time church attenders. Of the six invited, five filled out the email interview. The email interview was intended to get a bit more data from which I could assess the updated snapshot of where the church is at the end of the case study period. If I were to repeat this, I would likely opt for an in-person interview, as it would allow me to ask follow-up and clarification questions, as well as allowing the individuals to ask

questions of me. As it was getting close to the Christmas season, neither my interviewees nor I had the time to sit down face-to-face.

Of the five interviewees, three have started coming within the past three years and two for 12-13 years. One of the 'newer' attendees was a part of the church for a decade almost thirty years ago. The reflection results were as diverse as the people who filled them out. Interestingly, though, the ones who have attended the longest also had a slightly more negative take on the recent growth, or lack thereof. This makes sense, as they are seeing the church in the 'long view' and would be less likely to see any recent changes as 'growth' when compared to past 'glories.' For those who were willing and able to see the snapshot of the church in the case study period there was consensus that growth, while not anything huge, has begun in recent months. When they reflected on the ways we embrace differences within our community at the moment, the changes mentioned include starting a Spanish class, removing culturally conditioned pictures/items from worship spaces, and more willingness to move out of our comfort zone.

It was interesting to hear the reflections on the church's willingness to partner across differences. At least four of the five said they sense willingness to grow and change in order to partner across differences. Most also spoke of a lack of 'feet to the ground' in seeing that willingness turn into action. I am not similarly discouraged. Before feet can go to the ground, there needs to be a clear sense that change is needed, and that change begins with me and with our gathered community seeking to pursue God together.

Their reflections raise interesting questions, as I could hear them wrestling with 'how do we get from intention to action?' I feel this is a great place to be at the end of the case study

period, because it means that more people within the congregation are yearning for our actions to match what God might be calling us to. As a leader, this is encouraging to me. Change can create tension, and tension is not always comfortable, so having the stakeholders in the church desiring to see that change will help when the change becomes difficult.

For the question on reaching those in our community who are not yet represented, two main groups were mentioned: youth/young people and people of different language groups. Responders talked about internal and external barriers that will need to be addressed in reaching those groups. Internally there is a perceived lack of resources (time, people, etc.), and a lack of programming. Externally, there is a language barrier, cultural divide, and issues of 'secularism' to which we may not feel equipped to relate. The final question on what we need to change as a congregation spoke of a need for more diverse peoples to attend our church, more diverse leadership, more language representation, and a need to focus on the 'lost.'

Updated Snapshot: December 2019

The survey and interviews help to fill in a picture of an updated snapshot at the end of the case study period. While the demographics of our congregation did not largely change from the start to the end of the period, we have seen some movement in our gatherings in the same period.

First, there is a change in excitement within the church, and the sense that 'something is happening.' The church board has been encouraged that rather than the same '3 or 4' that have historically been involved in serving within the church, there is now a group of 10 or 11 who feel some ownership. The fact that 11 people gather monthly to pray for and dream about the

future of our congregation is not something they could have imagined happening if I had suggested it a year ago. The energy in the room when the vision team gathers, while not possible to measure, is almost electric. The group works well together, genuinely enjoys being together, and cares deeply about the future of the church.

Second, there is a change in the content and context of conversation. Before the case study period, I was often the only one who would start or turn the conversation to questions of how we engage the community, and how we ‘welcome well’ those who come. Now, it is just as frequent that another leader within the church will ask those questions and push us that direction. I can trust our leadership to ask questions of vision, mission, and community engagement, which allows me to work on pushing us to the next level. That is, as a result of the theological work I have done for this case study, we are wrestling with the ways in which we frustrate our own attempts to grow in our very diverse community by allowing one cultural or language group to dominate. I believe this is our new growing edge. To illustrate this, let us compare briefly two answers from the email interviews.

It's one thing to tell someone that you want them to be a part of something (what God is doing) and quite another, to make them feel as if they belong and that the "something" needs them.... In order for people to want to participate/buy in, they want to feel represented and the Lynn church of the Nazarene historically, has not appropriately represented its racial/ethnic makeup in format, worship music, nor has it appropriately represented the larger Lynn community in which it exists.¹⁰

If we walk in the way God wants us to as a body, then the people will come, and we will not have to be so concerned with demographics. We should be aware and knowledgeable of the people around us and the needs in our community but not to the point where we are so hyper-focused on the diversity and forgetting to spread the gospel message, who Jesus came for and how he ministered to his community.¹¹

10. Excerpt from “Person 3.” Email interview conducted by Heather Ardrey, December 2019.

11. Excerpt from “Person 5.” Email interview conducted by Heather Ardrey, December 2019.

Through the course of this case study, I have grown in my understanding of how hospitality plays into the ministries we do in and through the church. Yes, we should seek to create hospitable spaces and be sensitive to the diversity of people who would come in the doors of our church. Yes, we should seek to share hospitality outside the door of our church with others to whom the Lord calls us. But I believe God's invitation is more and stronger even than this, both within our walls and outside them – we are invited to allow *others* to host us. This means for the ones in a cultural majority in the gathered community of faithful, it is not enough simply to “walk the way God wants,” as Person 5 says, because, as Person 3 says, people “want to feel represented and the Lynn church of the Nazarene historically, has not appropriately represented its racial/ethnic makeup.” In other words, ‘being welcoming’ to others does not always equate to those same others ‘feeling welcomed’ to contribute to the format, culture, and ‘feel’ of a gathered people. It is not enough just to be who we are created to be in Christ and expect others to conform to our ways of worship, learning, and growth. We also have to allow ourselves to be who God created *them* to be so that we can each be shaped by the other.

I am glad to see some growth and movement within our congregation, but there is still much work to be done. Another growing edge which was highlighted by the community survey is the lack of substantial growth in individual or corporate prayer. As the Psalm says, “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.”¹² If our congregation desires to change in the ways that God is inviting us to, it is necessary that God be the one orchestrating

12. Psalm 127:1a.

the change. Without a substantial growth in our communal and individual prayer life, we risk growing something good apart from God, which would keep us from allowing God to grow something great.

I started this case study intending to lead our congregation to wrestle with issues of our own sense of identity and discomfort with change while preparing us to allow a more diverse representation of the kingdom of God to thrive in our community. The nature of our current conversations and discussions seem to suggest that we have done just that. Before the case study period, our congregation had a lower sense of excitement for future potential, a larger sense of concern for 'something new.' Now, though we are aware that change will be difficult, we are wrestling through what kind of change God might be inviting us to in order to allow for a more diverse expression of the kingdom of God to thrive in the Lynn Church of the Nazarene.

CHAPTER FIVE

OUTCOMES

I set out to explore through a case study with the Lynn church of the Nazarene whether a church can make a transition to a more diverse expression of the kingdom of God through prayerfully exploring issues of identity, calling, and relation to the other. To close out this thesis-project I will summarize the results of the case study and reflect on whether my original thesis was accurate. Finally, I will end with potential next steps for my local congregation, as well as some ways I could use the results of this study to support and challenge my church district and denomination.

Results and Reflections

Through sermons and conversations in large and small groups, in our church we have spent the past nine months exploring God's invitation for our local community. We spent time diving into scripture to hear and be challenged by God's call to be on mission in the midst of our lives. We explored God's heart for difference and learned tools for engaging others who are different from us. We allowed scripture to challenge us in the use of the power we find in our relationships with others. We also noticed and discussed the ways in which our current gathered community does not yet reflect the community around us.

On the one hand, the 'results' or growth I hoped to see is not yet deeply visible. As of the writing of this thesis-project, one new family has started regularly attending the church since March 2019. For a church of 46, though, that new addition can feel large. As I wanted to introduce change at the level of identity and sense of calling, it is understandable that the

hoped-for growth may not be visible for some time to come. However, the results of the interview and survey show that we are starting to move in that direction. There is an increase of excitement. Others are leading and engaging the conversation on our need to reach the community. Additionally, I have been able to shift my focus in leading this congregation from trying to get them to think toward God's invitation to us, to helping us wrestle through how we allow others to lead alongside us. I truly believe that God is growing the heart of this church for its community, and the growth taking place underneath, where we cannot yet see it, will be affecting our church in the months and years to come.

There are a few stories that are worth sharing to show how some of the growth is happening 'underneath' for individuals who are influencing decisions and church culture. One of our people who is newly connected with the church approached me and offered to help in any way they could. They have agreed to serve as a translator for any Spanish-speaking guests who might come. In response to this, the church board asked if we could get a yard sign in Spanish that reads "We Speak your Language" so Spanish speakers know they are welcome.

Another story took place at a recent board meeting. I had been approached by a Haitian pastor on my district asking if we were willing to allow them to plant a Haitian church in our building. I told them I would be happy to have a conversation and would be praying about what God might do. As I told the board, I expressed a desire to meet with this pastor to share my heart that our church in Lynn would be one church of many nations, with shared leadership, rather than many separate churches in one building. In response, one of the board members said, "Maybe God wants them to be one of the pastors of our church. Who knows what God's doing? Partnering with other ethnicities doesn't have to start with a Spanish speaker just

because we thought it would!” When I originally shared my dream that we would have a diverse pastoral team at the Lynn church, the board was skeptical and uncertain of how it would work. This response, instead of skepticism, was one of excitement. They still do not know logistically how shared leadership would look, but they saw this possibility as a potential God might be inviting us to. That is evidence of growth in their sense of identity and calling within our church.

Revisiting the Hypothesis

At the end of nine months of work toward this end, it is worth revisiting the original question and hypothesis: What would it take for a mono-cultural, diverse congregation in Lynn, MA to become a more diverse congregation with shared culture and shared leadership? A church can only make this transition by prayerfully addressing issues of identity, power, and calling.

Through this case study, it has become clear to me that this hypothesis still rings true. In a context as diverse as Lynn, I believe the call of God is for us to reflect our community, not for the sake of diversity, but for the sake of the kingdom of God. God’s heart is that his table of grace would be full of people who are of all ethnicities, genders, ages, education levels, jobs, etc. A place where the food insecure can have a meal with those who are food stable. A place where the highly educated can have deep friendships with some who may not have finished high school. A place where every ethnicity and language group can feel not only welcomed to attend but also welcomed to lead and share their giftings with the larger community of faith.

Unfortunately, that has not yet been the fullness of the story of the Lynn Church of the Nazarene. Though by any metric, we would be considered a multi-ethnic church, our church culture is more of an “assimilated multiracial congregation” rather than an “integrated multiracial congregation.”¹ In an assimilated, multi-racial congregation, minority cultural groups assimilate to the culture of the dominant culture and leadership is primarily from the dominant culture. I still believe that to move from that way of functioning into a church where our leadership reflects the cultures existing within it, where the congregational culture is enhanced and influenced by all cultures, it will take God’s Spirit working deeply to influence our sense of identity, calling, and God’s power changing the ways in which we use our power.

The concept behind my hypothesis is, I believe, still a solid one. Perhaps it fell short in the implementation because of the way that I sought to introduce change to our church system. I believe my instinct to engage the congregation in intentional discipleship around these issues was the right one. I truly believe that the changes in the hearts and minds and behaviors of our congregation that were influenced by our journey through calling, engaging others, and right use of power is only now starting. Some of these effects are latent and won’t be explicit for a while, if ever. The shaping effect is cumulative, and I have seen differences in the way our leaders talk about our church and their role in it, though we still have a way to go. I also think my instinct to host conversations where fears and concerns could be voices was the right one. It is unfortunate that the partnership with Vision Partners made it difficult for those

1. See Chapter Four of this thesis-project on the classification of the Lynn church as multi-ethnic. Curtiss Paul Deyoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey, and Karen Chai Kim, *United by Faith: The Multicultural Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 165-6.

conversations to continue. I hope to reinstate them in the summer of 2020 when our partnership with Vision Partners comes to a close.

There are two areas of introducing change in which I did not do so well, and it has resulted in smaller growth than may have been possible in the course of the case study period. First, my intent was that we approach these issues with prayer as the primary influencer. I did encourage individual prayer, but I did not lead well in having the community as a whole in prayer together. This is a lack that I would like to address as early as spring of 2020. Secondly, I did not lead well in the area of engaging and enhancing the diversity that was already present in our congregation. I will speak more of this in the next section. While we have seen some areas of growth, there is still much work to be done.

Next Steps

Any case study is just the next step in an ongoing iterative process of learning. For the Lynn Nazarene church, this nine-month period has been one of challenge and incubation. I believe that the things God started in this period will serve our congregation well to produce fruit down the road. However, as I've learned from this experience there are a few arenas I would like us to lean into as a congregation in the next few months to years.

Lynn Nazarene

First, as I stated previously, I did not lead well in the area of congregational prayer. We have tried with fits and starts to meet regularly to pray for God's heart for our city to be made clear to us. As of the writing of this thesis, we are not meeting outside of Sunday morning for

this. I think the ‘felt need’ within the congregation is for a weekly adult Bible study, but as a result of this case study, I see the actual need is for the gathered community to be intentionally praying for our church and our community.² We cannot be the people of God without the presence of God in our midst. Like the disciples in the upper room, we cannot be sent out on God’s mission in our community without the Spirit of God compelling us to go. I have spoken, preached, taught, and encouraged people to be praying daily, weekly for our church. However, I have not yet modeled it and invited others to join me in it. This needs to be a priority for us in the early part of 2020.

Second, as our church is already a multi-ethnic congregation, we need to be more intentional about utilizing the diversity in our midst. There are men and women who are part of the ‘minority’ cultures in our church who are feeling a call to ministry. I want to make it a priority of my ministry to invest in their development and to create space for them to lead cultural change in our church. As I reflect, I wonder if God has already brought some of our future diverse pastors to us. My prayer is that investing in those among us who are called to ministry will allow us to partner across differences to develop a worship service which reflects the cultures present in it, rather than expecting minority cultures to assimilate to a white church service.

I also believe that God’s vision for the future of Lynn Nazarene will not become entirely clear until we have a diverse leadership team. As one example of this potential investment in the difference that already exists, our current musical worship is very much culturally white,

2. Not that we really need to choose between Bible study and prayer, it just may be a matter that a regular corporate prayer should start before a Bible study does. We do not yet have the volunteer power, or the time in our schedule, to introduce too much too quickly.

while 40% of our congregation is not. I want to pray for musically gifted leaders who can help us grow in this area, and actively recruit musicians who feel a calling to serve in this way.

Additionally, I feel led to seek to reconnect with the folks who previously attended the Spanish Nazarene church in our building. It is possible that some of the growth in potentially becoming a multi-lingual church could come from these relationships.

District and Denominational Next Steps

The work of this case study and the ways I lead toward change have been focused in a particular location. However, the topics – dealing with difference, right use of power, hospitality within and through the church – are ones that are important for any local body where a group is gathered to follow and serve Jesus. As such, it is worth taking a moment to speak about which pieces can and should be extrapolated to other settings.

During my second-year project, I did a survey on our church district to see what training and education our pastors had received in the theology of difference, cultural dexterity, etc. I found there is a lack at a denominational level for training and education in these arenas. There is not currently any requirement for ministers seeking ordination to be educated about diversity, or cultural dexterity. I would like to explore further if the lack of training I found on our district is a denominational wide issue. I would love to become an advocate for requiring all pastors to be trained in cultural dexterity, conflict resolution, and a theology of differences. I also found that our denomination does not yet track the diversity found within local congregations. I would like to continue asking questions of ‘the right people’ to find out why we

are not tracking this, and whether our current tracking metrics need to change in order to prioritize an increase in the diversity in our local congregations.

At the district level, I would like to take the work I did in my year one and two projects, combined with the work from this case study, to offer a training for local pastors. At the very least, I would like to become engaged on the district level with thinking through how we approach ethnic-specific vs. multi-ethnic congregations, as our current mode of operation is multiple ethnic-specific congregations sharing a building. I think there is work, and even research, to be done on whether this is the best way forward for local churches, or if we could create a model of shared leadership, shared resources, shared mission.

Finally, I think it is entirely possible that at some point I take the theological work I did for the sake of this case study and expand it into a book form that could benefit our denomination and others. Particularly, I did not come across any books that are wrestling with the intersection of hospitality, power, and diversity in the church. As God is growing those themes deeply in my heart, I hope there is an opportunity someday to share those reflections and lessons with others.

Conclusion

In this case study I set out to explore whether a congregation can move toward a more diverse expression of the kingdom of God by prayerfully exploring issues of identity, calling, and right use of power. In the end, I believe our congregation has made some moves this direction. We have grown as a community and have a deeper sense of connectedness than we did when we started. Additionally, in vision team meetings you can sense the excitement and

camaraderie that comes of seeking God's intentions for us within a shared space. I believe we are taking steps toward a more diverse expression of the kingdom of God in Lynn, but still have changes to make in order to live that more fully.

I have been most deeply influenced during this case study by what I've been learning in regard to hospitality and power. I have been challenged that God sends us into the world as he came – vulnerably, requiring the hospitality of others in order to engage his mission. I do believe that to live this out as a community, we must be willing to understand our own identity better, willing to embrace the calling of God in our lives, and willing to give our power away for others to have space to join us in ministry. As we move forward, I believe our congregation can become a place where a diverse group of leaders shares responsibility for the shaping and executing of the mission of God through our gathered community within our larger setting.

The growth that I've seen over the last nine months will only continue as we actively pursue God's heart for our city through prayer, and as I and the other leaders are willing to model for the rest of the congregation what it means to lead through serving in partnership with others. As a white woman, I have a certain amount of power and privilege that I am called to use to serve the kingdom of God. Part of my calling in this place is to give away my power as the sole leader, inviting others who historically have been marginalized to lead alongside me. Within the kingdom of God, when we follow Jesus' example, giving power away does not diminish my capacity to serve. Instead, Jesus can take it, bless it, and multiply it for the use of God's ministry to the world.

APPENDIX A

SERMON SERIES

Accidental Missionaries: Becoming a Community on Mission

Week 1: Accidental Missionaries Introduction: I sent you there...

Jeremiah 29:1-14

Key Theme: God sent you to your life to be on his mission.

Week 2: Individual Barriers: I can't go... I don't have time...

Mark 1:16-21, 29, 2:1, 13-15

Key Theme: Discipleship and mission take place in familiar places

Week 3: Individual Barriers: I'm not trained for this...

Luke 10:1-11

Key Theme: We go on mission as guests in other people's comfort zones

Week 4: Individual Barriers: I'm not good enough...

Exodus 3-4

Key Theme: We don't go because WE'RE good enough, we go because GOD is good enough

Week 5: Community on Mission: What do you have?

Mark 6:30-44

Key Theme: God has given us what we need to fulfill the calling he's given us

Week 6: Community on Mission: What are you expecting?

John 12:9-16

Key Theme: We have to lay our expectations down to follow Jesus

Week 7: Community on Mission: What are you afraid of?

Mark 16:1-8

Key Theme: Fear is never the end of God's story

Week 8: Accidental Missionaries: What does it look like to be a community on Mission?

Acts 16:6-15

Key Theme: Listen for the voice of God, obey what he invites us to

Approaching Differences: Engaging 'The Other'

Week 1:

Gen 1:26-31, Gen 11:1-9, John 17:15-26, Acts 2:1-12

Key Theme: Diversity in Creation, fall, redemption

Tool(s): Cultural Iceberg, Differentiation

Week 2:

Luke 4:1-15

Key Theme: True self/ False self, temptation narrative

Tool(s): Reflective listening, Emotional health scales

Week 3:

Luke 6:1-11

Key Theme: Seeing others as Jesus sees them

Tool(s): Push back, Assumptions, Approaching differences diagram

Week 4:

Luke 10:25-37

Key Theme: Acting neighborly

Tool(s): Cultural Dexterity Scales

Week 5:

Acts 6:1-7

Key Theme: How to handle conflicts in the church

Tool(s): Conflict styles, Characteristics of Conflict

Hospitality and Power

Week 1: What is Hospitality – looking at the difference between the world’s use of hospitality, and God’s.

2 Samuel 17, 19 – story of Barzillai

Key Theme: God offers us extravagant hospitality, and wants our response to be to offer hospitality to others

Week 2: Hospitality and Power - introduction

Luke 22:14-27

Key Theme: God gives his power up to create space at the table for all

Week 3: Hospitality, Power, and Ministry

Acts 6:1-7

Key Theme: We are invited to use the power we're given to create space for others to serve/lead/follow God

Week 4: Hospitality, Power, and Forgiveness

Luke 7:36-50

Key Theme: We can give love extravagantly to others only because we know ourselves as deeply forgiven and loved by God

Week 5: Hospitality, Power, and 'Cleanliness'

Acts 10:1-28

Key Theme: Who's invited? God tore down all 'barriers' (even 'religious' ones) to call all 'clean' and invite them to his family

Week 6: Hospitality, Power, and 'the Great Commission'

Acts 8, Luke 10:1-11

Key Theme: Following the example of Jesus, we leave all our power behind, sent as guests in the comfort zone of others

Week 7: Worship as Hospitality – God's ridiculous dinner party - who's invited?

Luke 14:7-24

Key Theme: It's God's feast, he desires more diverse attendees, and more diverse cooks

APPENDIX B

VISION PARTNERS

I've included a synopsis of what we discovered as we worked together with Vision Partners. These items are not yet solidified, as we will not complete this process until May or June of 2020.

September: Rethink Obstacles

What Obstacles (Jars) do we have

Uncertainty, Apathy, Church Culture, Expectations, Stability, Community

What would it mean to smash these Jars?

Liberation, Unlimited Possibilities, Invitation, Step out of Comfort

October: Clarify Calling

Key Verse/Story

For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts. As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed; nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. *So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.* (1 Thess 2:5-8, NRSV)

Amplified Sentence

Lynn Church of the Nazarene exists to glorify God and develop disciples by leveraging:

A caring, generous, and spiritually maturing congregation

With a deep passion for meeting the needs of a diverse community in partnership with others.

In a multi-national, changing city with many basic insecurities.

Short Phrase

Growing in Christ, Caring for the Community

One Word

Caring

November: Design Mission

Mission Statement

Helping unconnected people find their home in Christ's family

APPENDIX C

CHURCH REFLECTION SURVEY

Participation in this survey is ANONYMOUS and VOLUNTARY.

ANONYMOUS: No personally identifying information is being collected. Survey responses will only be used together with all responses. Any open answer responses will not be linked to an individual person. Any of your survey responses used in the Thesis Project report will not be linked to you in any way that will allow someone to identify you.

VOLUNTARY: By filling out this survey, you are agreeing to participate in this research project. You may opt out at any time by not finishing the survey, or by not handing it in.

Questions 1-10 were asked to use the following scale. An average of the results are included in italics after each question.

| | | | | | |
|--|-------------------|---|----------------------------|---|----------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | Strongly Disagree | | Neither agree nor disagree | | Strongly Agree |

Reflecting on your **PERSONAL** growth and discipleship over the past 6 months, please answer the following:

| | # responses - <i>average</i> |
|---|------------------------------|
| 1. I grew in my love for Jesus | 10 – 4.1 |
| 2. I grew in my desire to befriend people different than me | 10 – 4.2 |
| 3. I grew in my <u>understanding</u> of God's mission in the world | 10 – 4.0 |
| 4. I grew in my <u>desire to be engaged</u> in God's mission in the world | 10 – 4.0 |
| 5. I am praying more now than I was 6 months ago | 10 – 3.1 |

Reflecting on **OUR CHURCH'S** growth over the past 6 months, please answer the following:

| | # responses - <i>average</i> |
|---|------------------------------|
| 6. We grew in our love for Jesus | 9 – 3.8 |
| 7. We grew in our <u>understanding</u> of God's mission in the world | 9 – 3.8 |
| 8. We grew in <u>our desire to engage</u> our community with God's mission | 8 – 3.6 |
| 9. We are <u>more willing</u> to share leadership with people who are different than us | 9 – 3.8 |
| 10. We are praying more now than we were 6 months ago | 9 – 3.6 |

Open Ended Questions – All results received are included in italics:

Q1: What is 1 thing God has been teaching you over the past 3 months about being his disciple?

- To ask and trust his leading in my life*
- Sometimes it requires me to stretch beyond my comfort zone*
- that in order to do so in an effective way, I've got to establish balance in my life*
- just do it. Keep it simple. Don't over think, don't make excuses. Don't constantly rely on grace. Just do it.*
- To get moving!*
- I need to let the Lord do the work in my life & form my identity*
- to be a blessing to people each day*
- Everything in his timing*

Q2: What is 1 thing God has been teaching you over the past 3 months about engaging people who are different than you?

- Feel free to listen and to be open to their thoughts and share my faith*
- It is hard but worth it*
- "meet people where they are"*
- That is the very work of the church, therefore, is something we must make a priority, despite its challenges*
- Just do it. Doesn't require a seminary degree. Just willingness.*
- We need to love more without restriction*
- I need to be intentional about where I spend my time*
- To love everyone unconditionally*
- to listen more*

Q3: Name at least 3 changes you think we need to make in our church so we can better engage our diverse city?

- reaching out to the people in our neighborhood*
- helping those less fortunate*
- sharing Christ love every time we have an opportunity*
- More outreach to local community*
- living and engaging with our neighbors***
- partnering w/other service providers in the community*
- Raise/build up a more diverse leadership team***
- implement a more ethnically inclusive worship service*
- Invite people*
- I would like to see an intentional effort made to bring back people who have left***
- Be persistent, i.e. don't grow weary in doing good*
- Take action, find ways to let the city know we are here and invested***
- Speak the language – reach out*
- Have a heart to serve and go forth*
- volunteering together as a church*

Q3: Continued

-adding elements of musical worship that are appealing to broader people groups (whether they are present in the congregation or not)

-Ending the rigid structure of worship

-To recruit more people

-To encourage discouraged people

-to be quick to listen, slow to speak, & slow to anger

-Be more active outside the walls

-listen more

-show my empathy

Q4: Looking at your three suggested changes – Circle the change which is most important (in your opinion).

*Any that were marked are included in **bold italics** above.*

Thank you so much for taking the time to help!

Please fold your survey and put it in the envelope on the back desk.

APPENDIX D

EMAILED INTERVIEW

Thank you so much for taking the time to be a part of this research project. The project is a case study of our church over the past 6-7 months. I am attempting to assess our growth regarding our church's sense of identity in Christ, sense of calling to engage the community, and willingness to share authority/leadership with others who are different than us.

By sending answers in response to this email, you are consenting to participate in this interview. Responses given will be combined with other email interviews to create a current snapshot of our church, and what our growth areas have been in the recent months. Quotes from your response may be used in my research paper but will in no way be linked to any information that can be used to identify you.

1. How long have you been at Lynn church of the Nazarene? How would you describe our church?
2. What's the biggest change you've seen in our church since you started coming?
3. In what ways is our church intentional about embracing differences within our gathered community?
4. Have you sensed growth in our church's willingness to partner with others who are different than us? Why or why not? Give an example.
5. Think about the community surrounding our church and the groups of people who are NOT currently represented in our church: What are the biggest challenges we face in reaching these groups?
6. If we want to partner and share leadership with a more diverse group of people, how do we need to change as a congregation?

Interview results are available upon request.

APPENDIX E

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

For any local church pastors who may be reading this thesis I want to offer a few questions for reflection in your local setting. Just as a reminder, when I talk about difference, I am not meaning simply ethnic differences, though it may include that. When you find differences in education level, gender, even age, you will find different levels of power and influence within your local church context. When I speak of cultural groups, it can mean generational culture, educational culture, ethnic cultures, language cultures, or others.

What kinds of differences already exist in your local church context? Are those differences represented on the leadership level?

Which cultural group is the primary shaper of your church culture? What cultural groups are left out of shaping?

Does your worship (musical or otherwise) reflect the diversity in your congregation?

Does the diversity in your congregation reflect the diversity in your community?

Where might God be inviting you to release the power you've been given so that others different than you can shape your church culture?

What cultural groups might God be inviting you to partner with to serve your community?

What cultural groups might God be inviting you to visit, to allow them to host you in their comfort zone?

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VITA

Heather Reneé Ardrey

Born in 1979, Missouri, U.S.A

Education and Accomplishments

- DMin, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary** (Hamilton, MA) 2016-Present
- Concentration: Leadership in a Changing Church Context
 - Anticipated Graduation: May 9, 2020
- Ordained Elder in the Church of the Nazarene** (Upstate NY District) 2011
- MDiv, Nazarene Theological Seminary** (Kansas City, MO) 2006
- Concentration: Honors Program
 - Wynkoop Center for Women in Ministry Research Award (2006)
 - Graduated Magna Cum Laude
- BA, Eastern Nazarene College** (Quincy, MA) 2001
- Concentration: Religion
 - John N. Nielson Preaching Award (2001)
 - Outstanding Senior in Religion (2001)
 - Graduated Cum Laude

Publications

Ardrey, Heather. "Everyday Holiness: Meditations on Identity & Calling." In *Renovating Holiness*. Josh Broward and Thomas Ord, eds. Nampa, ID: Sacra Sage, 2015.

Work History

- Lynn First Church of the Nazarene** (Lynn, MA) 2018 – Present
- Lead Pastor
- Island Memorial Chapel Protestant Church** (Kwajalein, Marshall Islands) 2014 – 2018
- Associate Pastor
 - Interim Pastor
- InterVarsity Christian Fellowship** (Troy, NY; Cambridge, MA) 2007 – 2014
- Interim Area Director
 - Graduate & Faculty Campus Minister